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HEAVENLY VISIONS

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AN EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

BY

CHARLES BROWN

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LONDON
JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13 & 14 FLEET STREET
1910

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2825
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FOREWORD

THE following pages consist of a series of expositions of the book of Revelation.

In the course of my ordinary ministry I have been carefully reading the book and talking about it to my congregation on Sunday mornings. That fact will account in some measure for the informal and colloquial style of these studies. I was anxious for myself and for readers and hearers of the simpler sort to discover the real meaning and message of the book, and to rescue it from the hands of fanciful and grotesque expositors. Those who know the books will recognise at once that I owe much to Professor Ramsay's book on the Seven Churches in Asia, and to Professor Swete on the Apocalypse. I am also indebted to Professor C. Anderson Scott for many suggestions contained in his valuable little book on Revelation in the Century Bible series, and to Dean Alford's Greek Testament. I have read with much interest and some disagreement Dr. Milligan's book on Revelation in the Expositor's Bible, and a small volume of addresses delivered many years ago by Dr. John Brown, late of Bedford.

I can scarcely hope to have added anything original or of permanent value to the many books that have

been published on this the most difficult book in the New Testament. My purpose will be served if some of my many friends throughout the country are led through these pages to read carefully the book for themselves. If that be done they will become profoundly interested by it as I have, and even fascinated by it; and they will, I trust, discover that it contains a real and inspiring message from the living Christ to His people in these modern times, a message which declares with certitude the ultimate victory of good over evil, and the universal and complete dominion of our God and of His Christ.

With the full consciousness of its many and sad defects I venture to send the book to the press, and yet with the humble prayer that it may bless some who read it and inspire them with the earnest desire and resolve to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth and to aid in the bringing in of His Kingdom.

CHARLES BROWN.

Ferme Park Baptist Church,
August, 1910.

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HEAVENLY VISIONS

THE HEAVENLY VISION

Rev. i. 1—3

The title of the book before us is "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," "Divine" meaning what we mean by the term when we apply it to a writer or speaker who is an expert in theology. How old the title is as compared with the book we cannot tell. But it will be observed that the writer calls it "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." We stop at the first word for a moment. The "Apocalypse" is literally the uncovering, unveiling of that which has been hidden, and the "unveiling of Jesus Christ" in this passage means the unveiling which He accomplished. Not a revelation *concerning* Him, but a revelation brought by Him. And it is not the revelation which He brought to men in the days of His flesh and by His earthly life and teaching, death and resurrection; not that, but a distinct and definite revelation which was sent to His servants at a specific time and to meet a special need.

The word *revelation*, however, in the book before us has a special meaning. It is the name given to a certain

kind of literature called the apocalyptic literature, and familiar to the Jewish people. It is difficult to describe in a few words, but some of its characteristics were:

(1) The treatment of current events and the discussion of living persons in terms of figures and symbols; and while this may seem like a clouding and covering rather than an unveiling, the term *revelation* is warranted by the fact that the revelationist made known, or professed to make known, the Divine will concerning these persons and events, in the present and the future.

(2) Another characteristic of this same literature is that the writer hides his identity sometimes, or seeks to give greater weight to his writings by sheltering himself behind some great name of the past or the present. Hence in some measure the discussion which has taken place concerning the authorship of this particular book.

For the rest it may be said that the revelationist is a man who sees strange and mystical visions full of portent for his own times and the times which are to follow; and that this book stands quite by itself in the New Testament. Nor is there more than one book in the Old Testament that partakes entirely of the same character, and that is the book of Daniel.

Speaking generally of the book, let it be said at once that there are mysteries in it which are impossible to interpret; they would probably be interpretable by those to whom they were written. But the fact that people

have seen the Church of Rome, Napoleon, the French Revolution, the Papists, and even Martin Luther, in the book; that they have professed to find in it the calculable date for the end of the world, and many other things, should warn us against being literal in our interpretation. It is by catching the spirit that breathes through the symbols that we best interpret the author's meaning.

It has been called a "Tract for the Times"; undoubtedly it was that, and more—a tract for those times, and for *all* times.

You see who is its human author. He calls himself John, and the fact that he does not call himself an apostle of Christ as Paul does has helped to the conclusion which some have formed that this is not the apostle's writing, but that of another John. More and more, however, scholarly opinion has come round to the conviction expressed by Justin Martyr (A.D. 140) and Tertullian (A.D. 200), that this is the work of the man who leaned his head on the Lord's breast.

As to the people in whose behalf the book is written, they are described in verse 4 as the "*seven churches which are in Asia.*" But here at the very outset we must beware of a slavish literalism. Undoubtedly we are confronted with the symbolism which pervades the book. There were more than seven churches in Asia, and it is scarcely likely that any church would be left out of the purview of Christ and His apostle. The term, like that of the "seven spirits" in verse 4, may be taken

as symbolical; and though the seven churches are named and details of their life given, yet we may believe that the message which was sent to them was intended for all, and would be read by all—with awe and wonder. And we may yet further believe that, apart from and above local conditions and necessities, there is a permanent element in this book; a message from the living and reigning Lord for His churches in every clime and land; a word of warning and rebuke and encouragement.

As to the purpose of the book, it is intended, like the Epistle to the Hebrews and 1 Peter, to encourage faith and endurance, to arouse energy and quicken love, in the midst of the deadening influences of worldly temptation and trial, difficulty and persecution. The trials in this case were probably due to the rule of the Roman Empire under Domitian, for Professor Ramsay, among others, lends the weight of his great authority to the later date of this book.

Finally, on the matter of the book, we may probably think of it as a letter written or dictated by the aged apostle John, sent by him as one of the last acts of his life to the churches of Christ whose names are here, and to other churches in the province of Asia. Professor Ramsay has pointed out at great length, in his invaluable book on the Seven Churches, that letter-writing and circulation occupied an important place in the Roman Empire; that the great Roman roads were used for postal service; and that the Christians availed themselves of this

prevalent custom and the facilities which were offered by the State, in the service and interests of the Kingdom of God and the Church of Christ. We have to think of this strange and wonderful book as a letter, written by an old man who had just returned from exile, to the churches that he loved and to the whole Church of Christ. Its subject is the conflict of Christ with evil, and His triumph over it. The prologue to the letter is now before us.

1. You will observe at once the august authority with which it is clothed. *The author of the revelation is God.* It is no mere human document, not the speculation of a lonely man in exile, the dreamings of a mystic. It is a piece, as its author declares, of the mind and will of God which He desired to impart to men. It is interesting from a theological point of view to observe that the Son is the Mediator of revelation between God and men. It is Christ or His angel who appears in vision to Paul and John. He in His risen life, as in the days of His flesh, is the revealer, the bringer of truth and light to men. There may be some difficulty occasioned by the latter part of verse 1, because, as we shall see in one of our subsequent studies, the Lord appears directly to the vision of John; but His place is subsequently taken by the angel, who talks with John and shows him many things, and who, when the apostle falls at his feet in act to worship, protests, and forbids the homage, declaring that he is the fellow servant of the apostle.

What is to be particularly observed is that God has something to show to certain men, something that He longs to impart to the people who are called here the servants or slaves of Christ.

Lay it down as a general and certain principle that it is the will of God to reveal spiritual facts and issues to His servants. It is not His will that we should be agnostics walking in the dark, stretching lame hands of faith, gathering dust and chaff, etc. A man may have to pass through such a phase of experience as that on his way to clearer and fuller light; but it is not the normal condition, in God's intention, of His children. Here is how Paul states the case: "The eyes of your heart being enlightened that ye may know." And if we have no sure knowledge of things unseen, the defect is with us; it may perhaps be found in our failure to make that complete surrender of ourselves to God which alone warrants our calling ourselves His children or His servants. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." "I have called you friends, for *all* things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Rely upon it there is a vast amount of light to be shed on the unseen, the future, the meaning and purpose of trial and suffering, and the way to alleviate and heal. The same Lord who came to John in Patmos draws near to us with a revelation to show to His servants. The difficulty with us is that we are not in the Spirit as he was; we are too preoccupied to listen. There is too much "clamour

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loud" in our hearts for us to hear His voice; we are too impatient to listen to spiritual things.

2. The next point to be observed is that God makes one man the channel of His communications to other men. He has a revelation to show to His servants. He sends and signifies it to His servant John. That does not destroy or weaken the idea to which we must hold fast, that God reveals Himself directly to the commonalty of His people. Nor does it furnish ground for the contention that a specific order of men are the exclusive channels of God's communications to others. I learn of God indirectly. He teaches me through the experience, the example, the word of other men. The Pope of Rome, the Archbishop of Canterbury, a priest in either church, may bring me a message which I shall discern to be a word of God. So may a little child, as Samuel to Eli; so may a poor bedridden woman. It is not the office, but the man; not because a man is in a certain office, but in a certain spiritual condition that he receives revelation and illumination. And I am concerned—it is one of the things to be fought for as a vital thing—to maintain that *I*, apart from any human medium, may receive communications from God; that if He may send a revelation through the priest to me, He may equally surely send a communication through me to the priest. Often and often He has passed by the official, and gone to the man whom nobody knew, going to Amos, the agricultural labourer in Tekoa; to John the Baptist in the wilderness, past all the hierarchy

of Jerusalem (see Luke iii. 1). There may be various reasons assigned. It is at least possible in the present case that John was the only servant completely accessible to God just then; or that, having known Christ in the flesh and been chosen by Him as an apostle, having lived in fellowship with the risen Christ, and been a faithful steward of the word of His grace, he was by far the most suitable man to be found; and that the Divine communication would be more surely believed, more clearly understood, and more faithfully delivered by him than by any other, and would come with greater authority. For we may well understand that it has ever been God's method to raise up certain men who shall be His messengers to others, and it is not His wont to cast them aside so long as they are faithful in receiving and giving.

3. There is yet another possibility which it is interesting to entertain, namely, that the exile to which the writer refers in verse 9 was necessary in order that he might receive the word of God and the testimony of Christ. Professor Ramsay, from whose delightful book I shall often quote during these studies, tells us that it is most probable that this old man was sent to Patmos to work with gangs of convicts in the quarries there, and it may have been in a convict's miserable hut that the faithful soul received the revelation, the glowing visions of Divine realities and of the triumph of his Lord. Certain it is that God sometimes is compelled to detach men from their surroundings, and to permit heavy trial to befall

them in order to get a chance with them. And there may be revelations of God's grace and goodness coming to His servants in days of isolation and gloom and suffering, which could never come in pleasant and happy surroundings.

Probably the suffering of Patmos was necessary to the revelation; and I fancy it is ever to the man who has learned of God in solitude and sorrow that we are most willing to listen.

4. The next point demanding attention is what this man did with the revelation which came to him. It is all contained in verse 2: "He bare record," or "witness." It is simply a statement that he was a faithful steward with that which he had received. You understand the word "record" in these days of phonographs and gramophones. You know that the cylinder or disc gives back again faithfully that which has been committed to it by the human voice. It is precisely what John says he has done in this book. The important thing here is that the word has fallen upon a sensitive and discerning human soul. Said He who was Himself the Supreme Revelation and Revealer of God to man, "All things whatsoever I have heard of the Father I have made known to you"; Paul said, "I have not shunned to declare among you the whole counsel of God"; John says he "bare witness," and you will notice his threefold method of stating things—it is quite characteristic of him—"of the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things he saw." It

means that, like his Master, he is a faithful *witness;* mark the word—not inventor, theoriser, speculator, but *witness.* It is the need of this time and all time—in Sunday school class and in pulpit. Not men and women who will discuss *pros* and *cons*, probabilities and peradventures, but who will say, "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." People who will suffer themselves to be called aside by God, who will listen and receive and feel and be led, and then will go and tell others what they have seen and experienced. He "bare witness," which is to say, he fulfilled the purpose and intention of his Master who in the sacred moment of farewell said to the men whom He left, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." It is what He calls out for to-day. It is what He will have in thousands of pulpits and Sunday schools to-day—people who are neither unwilling nor ashamed nor afraid to bear witness to say, "Come and hear, ye that seek after God. I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

5. Finally, note what is to be done with the revelation by those to whom it comes. It is the beatitude and benediction of the prologue.

It is to be read. John has written it at the command of the glorified Lord, who, in His august majesty, has spoken to him, "What thou seest write in a book and send it." It was written in order that it might be *read.* And what is said of this book may be said of the whole Bible. The men who wrote did so on a Divinely-given impulse. It was borne in upon them that

what they had seen and heard and known they should write.

Now, "*blessed is he that readeth.*" The primary reference is to the man who, having read for himself, stands up and reads to others; and you may think of clusters of people gathered round a reader in the province of Asia while he read all the words of the book. But the further reference is to us. Men have poured out their souls on the written page and at the bidding of God. This whole book is His message to men; many of us are treating it with culpable neglect; the blessing of him who reads and hears read is a blessing we are scarcely in a position to claim. And our further sin is that we have not "kept." We have sometimes prided ourselves on our hearing or reading, but the Bible itself always puts hearing and doing together; the one without the other is not only useless, it is harmful and even damning. What a consideration that opens up to us! How lightly we treat the word of God. I believe that He does still give revelations to men, and that the man of pure intention will discern the word to be the truth. But with what slight regard we treat it! So much so that a preacher is at times in despair, and questions seriously whether it be not a waste of time and breath to proclaim the truth that he knows. We discuss the style of delivery, express our pleasure or otherwise, agree with and sometimes are impressed by what we hear. The last thing we think of doing is keeping. "The time is at hand"; so closes the brief passage which has been

before us for our meditation. What time? The end of reading and hearing, at least. Persecution was about to break, and many of them would be swept away before its storm was over. For anything we know the time is at hand for us. Speaking and hearing ought to become a serious business, and to trifle or dream away the opportunity a culpable fault.

I covet for my readers and for myself the blessing of the diligent hearer and keeper of the words of every prophecy that comes from God.

THE SALUTATION

Rev. i. 4—8

This is called the salutation of the Apocalypse by commentators. That is to say, this last book of the New Testament, like the Epistles of Paul, is addressed to certain people, *and is really a letter.* The writer while using the apocalyptic form in all chapters after the third, yet diverges from the apocalyptic form and adopts the epistolary form here. He wraps up the Apocalypse in a covering letter which he addresses to the seven churches in Asia, which churches represent all other churches in Asia, and which contain characteristics that may be said to represent all Christian churches at the present time.

The explanation of the apostle's adoption of this epistolary form of communication probably is, the pastoral instinct is strong in him, and he has a personal love for the people to whom he writes which craves for something closer than the apocalyptic form of communication. He has not merely something to reveal to people, he has a great and tender love in his heart for those to whom the revelation is to go. They are his own friends, close and dear. He calls himself (verse 9) their "brother and companion." He regards himself as bound

to share with them whatever knowledge God has given to him. Being a letter addressed definitely in the first place to communities specifically named, the book will be likely to contain allusions which are purely local. It would be well to remember that in reading the Revelation. There are elements in it of universal and perpetual application. But there are also elements that are temporary and local, and it may well be that some of the things which to us are dark and incomprehensible would be perfectly clear to the people who first read or heard this great letter. They might reasonably possess the key of the symbolism that is a locked secret to us.

The first thing to be observed about the letter just now is its authority. We noticed in our last study that the writer claimed that God was the author of the communication which he brought to the Christians in Asia. Here he pronounces something more than an apostolic benediction. When he says, "Grace and peace unto you," he is doing more than giving expression to a devout wish or an apostolic prayer; the form of the whole passage, the stately procession of the persons in the Trinity, compel you to regard this as an august and authoritative pronouncement. He is not uttering his own pious wish, but a message which he is commissioned to deliver.

We may turn aside for a moment to consider the description given of the persons in the Godhead. The order is unusual for one thing. The Father, the Spirit (for the seven Spirits may confidently be taken to mean the Holy Ghost in His perfection of being and activity),

and the Son. Probably the order is so taken because he has most to say of the Lord Jesus, and carries on the narrative naturally with Him as the centre of the paragraph.

But the description is also and in some measure unusual. "*Him who is, and was, and is to come*" implies more than the eternity of God. It implies His presence and activity in the affairs of men in all ages. This whole book is framed on the assumption that God still communicates with man. There are some people who think of God in the past tense. Their language would be, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their time, in the days of old." So there are people who think of the Lord Jesus as having lived and departed, of the wondrous days when He taught and wrought on the earth, and they often fail to realise the Divine presence and activity now. On the other hand there have been people, and there are, who, in relation to Christ, think almost exclusively of His coming again. Their Christ is in the future coming in clouds of glory, or seated amid the perfect glory and bliss of heaven. We should think of the God of our fathers and of the Christ of history, the Christ of the manger and the carpenter's shop, of Galilee and Jerusalem, and of the God who always will be—whose eternal years will outlast all human life—and of the eternal Christ whom we must all meet face to face. But, after all, I venture to declare that the principal thing for us all is to realise the living God,

the present Christ. I fancy that was the great defect of several of the churches in Asia. Not only is Christ coming, but He is here. "Lo, I am with you alway." In all three descriptions of the persons of the Godhead in this chapter the present tense comes first. Him which IS, and which was, in verses 4 and 8; and in verse 18 again the present is put before the past—"I am He that LIVETH." He, our Lord, is to come again in power and great glory, and every eye shall see him, according to verse 7. *But He is here*—there, it seems to me, a considerable part of the emphasis needs to be placed. He walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. If I can only realise that my Lord is *here*, that His eyes which are as a flame of fire are searching my heart and thought, I shall not go far astray about the historical Christ nor about the second advent. It is the *living* Christ that the Church needs to realise.

You will observe the threefold description of Christ given in verse 5. Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. It is stated after John's threefold manner, which, you will observe, prevails in this paragraph. There are not only the three persons in the Trinity, but God is, and was, and is to come; Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, etc., etc.

The latter part is quoted and altered from Ps. lxxxix. 27: "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." It shows John's exalted conception of Christ, the faithful Witness, on whose word men may

absolutely build; "the firstborn of the dead," indicating, surely, not only that Christ rose from the dead to die no more, but that all who are born of God in Him shall rise also, or, as Paul puts it, "Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ's." "And the *Ruler*, etc."; there is probably a reference to the great world-power, which seemed to be getting all government into its own hands, and was threatening to crush the Kingdom of Christ. The kings of the earth have only a semblance of power, after all; the true Ruler of men is unseen, and He will yet come to His own. Now observe that it is from the *great Triune God* that the apostle brings His message. By Him he is commissioned, and the first word of the message is "GRACE AND PEACE." I decline to regard these expressions as a mere formula of greeting. I take it that they are living terms, and that they mean what they say, and that to these faulty and imperfect Christian churches, and consequently to us faulty and imperfect Christians, this is the Divine message. All the stern and sharp words that are said afterwards, and they are many, are to be regarded as written under these two words. Nothing that is said is inconsistent with the fact of God's undeserved favour, His benignancy to men, His supreme desire to bring peace. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future, and a hope." And it is precisely the message that God would send to His own everywhere to-day, quieting distrust, banishing doubt and fear, falling with healing and

stimulating influence on the spirit. Grace and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

2. The thought of the essential greatness of God, coupled with His grace, causes the writer to break forth into *the doxology of verses* 5 *and* 6, a pure and beautiful ascription of praise to Christ poured forth from a full and loving heart. After the writer's manner, it declares three things concerning Christ, and they are all three in relation to us who believe. "He loveth, hath washed or loosed us from our sins, and made us kings and priests." The apostle is not sending a greeting now; when he did that he used the second person plural, here he uses the first. He places himself by the side of the Christians in all the churches in Asia, and says, "*He hath loosed* US *from our sins.*" Whether the sins of a man be those of the saint and apostle or those of the worst man in Sardis there is remission through the blood of Christ.

The great apostles are in perfect union on this matter; it is the bright centre of their teaching concerning our Lord's death. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins," writes Paul; and John, "He hath loosed." The two versions differ in the word used—one says "washed," the other "loosed." The two words from which they come differ only by one letter, and the manuscripts from which our New Testament is translated are about equal in their authority for one and the other. And as regards our Lord they are both true. We are both cleansed and loosed from sin. One word speaks of cleansing from stain; the other

of freeing from bondage, from the domination of a tyrant; and both these are ours in Jesus Christ and through His death. How it takes place we may not be able to tell; *that* it takes place in the soul that commits itself to Christ the apostles of the Lord most surely believed and taught. It was the crowning wonder of their life and ministry.

And the root of it is the Divine love; the revisers have served us well in putting the verb in the present tense. He not only *loved*, but He *loveth*. It was not only that Divine pity led the Son of God to make the great renunciation and sacrifice. There is this further fact, that His love remaineth, for the faithless and fickle and feeble Christians of Asia. You know in advance what severe things the Lord of the Church will say to some of the churches; you know *now* that all His utterances spring from His love, as truly as did His work on the Cross. The love out of which that work sprang is an eternal and undying thing. It is not turned away by our unworthiness—"Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." It is not to have doubt cast upon it by the severity of the experiences of trial through which people are passing. His message to one of the churches is: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." His severity as truly as His gentleness springs from His love.

Then observe that cleansing and freeing is not the whole of God's purpose for us. He made us to be a

kingdom. We used to say, He hath made us to be *kings* and priests. Doubtless the revisers are right. Of old time the word that came to Israel was, "*Ye shall be a kingdom of priests*," and this is a quotation from the words of Moses to Israel. It is quite a question whether the separate priesthood in Israel was not an afterthought, brought in because of the unfitness of the *whole nation* to act the part of priests; and if that were not so, whether it were not to be regarded as representative (rather than exclusive) of what Jehovah intended the whole nation to be—a kingdom of priests.

But the word has a special meaning here. A kingdom is an organised and governed community. The people to whom this great letter came knew what a kingdom was: it meant rule, and authority, and power. They saw a kingdom spreading and spreading, until it threatened to fill the whole world, and to dominate men's religion, crushing the faith of Christ by force. And John said, "He who is the Ruler of the Kings of the earth hath made us a kingdom." We are an organised community, a nation. The old Israel is gone, Jerusalem is destroyed, the Temple is gone. But there is a *new Israel*, a new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven—a nation whose King is in the midst of her, unseen by mortal eyes. He hath made *us* a kingdom. We are not scattered and defenceless units; we have a King, and we have laws of His to keep, ordinances to observe; and where His laws and ordinances clash with human laws, we know which to obey. You

feel the throb of dignity in the apostle's utterance. Many of the people to whom he wrote were not considered worthy of the dignity of citizens of the proud Roman Empire. But they were citizens of a spiritual kingdom—a heavenly country. "Their palaces were houses not made with hands, their diadems crowns of glory that would not fade away." They were a kingdom unto God and His Father, not merely a kingdom in His sight, constituted by His authority, but *a Kingdom over which He ruled*, where His laws were kept, where His protection and defence could be claimed, and in the midst of which He loved to dwell. There is one point more to be observed. The kingdom is characterised. All its citizens are priests—*all*, and not a few of them—the men with the white robes who are always in the Temple because they are always in the presence of God.

But what a wonderful conception this is of this book! God loves us before we are cleansed or loosed, while we are beggars in moral rags and filth, while we are rebels to His authority; and His love works the great transformation, it cleanses and frees and makes capable of service — the highest service; and not only makes capable of it, but calls to it. For what is a priest? Not merely an official who wears a white robe and lives a sheltered and privileged life in the precincts of a temple, but one who has access to God, and who keeps himself separate not for himself alone and his own salvation, but for other men.

The priest, as the Mosaic economy sets him before us, is like the king, ever the most unselfish of men, carrying the sins of others as a burden on his own heart into the presence of God, and making atonement and intercession for them, having compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way, and carrying to them as God's almoner His messages of pardon and peace.

There is the writer's magnificent conception of the Christian calling, standing at the preface of this remarkable book. *There is what we ought to be* who have been baptised into the name of Christ. It is God's design that I should be a free man—not only free from condemnation, but free from enslaving passion. But that is only a part—I am not only called to purity, I am called to citizenship. Christianity is a practical thing. Citizenship means rights and privileges, and protection of person and possessions. But it also means responsibility and service. True citizenship means patriotism, lawful living, willingness to render whatever service may be in my power. If I am a Christian I have been made a citizen—"a fellow citizen with the saints," Paul says. But that means that I am to be of like temper with the saints. And the service I am to render, what is it? Well, I am to intercede with God for men and with men for God; I am to play my part in a very real way in reconciling men to God. To me has been committed the ministry of reconciliation. According to Peter and Paul and John this ministry devolves upon every

member of the true Church of Christ. A kingdom of priests, or, as Peter says, "a royal priesthood." The Christian life is not a thing of days and forms and ceremonies, not giving in your name, joining a society. It is a great and solemn career, a noble and splendid calling, a sacred entrustment.

ST. JOHN'S VISION

REV. i. 9—20

WE come to the vision of the glorified Christ which His servant saw. Before we come to the vision itself however, there are one or two points to be touched upon.

First, there is the writer's description of himself in verse 9: "*Your brother and partaker with you, etc.*" In verse 4 he has appealed to them rather with the apostolic authority which belonged to him. Here he places himself alongside of them and on the same level, which would strengthen his appeal, and which, moreover, is the more remarkable in view of the marvellous vision which he is about to relate. It seems to indicate that he has not been exalted above his brethren by the abundance of the revelations given to him, and also that a man who was their companion had beheld these wondrous things; and if he, why not they? It is interesting to notice in passing the things of which John and the ordinary Christians in Asia are partakers—tribulation, kingdom and patience. They are stated thus after the threefold method of John. And they are all "in Jesus," that is, they are the appointed lot of all who are in Him.

There seems no reason why, for convenience' sake, we

should not change the order of things and say there is *kingdom*, that is, rule and authority in Jesus; that the soul which is in Him should look to Him for direction and authority. He is the *King* of the heart that trusts Him, which means for us citizenship—our claim upon His interest and love and protection; and our loyal homage and obedience also. But there is "tribulation" in Him also. The New Testament is very explicit about this, "Through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom," and through tribulation we remain citizens. So far from being surprised if some share falls to our lot we should rather be surprised if we escape it, and so far from mourning over it, we should regard it as a proof of our citizenship. For tribulation is not all that there is in Jesus, there is patience, and the one is to be set over against the other. There is a good deal of tribulation out of Christ, both now and hereafter, without the corresponding compensations. In Him there is patience—power to endure. Paul declares the strange doctrine that "tribulation" worketh patience; you might have thought that it would work *im*-patience, and so it does when a man gets away from Christ; but in Him *patience*. The testimony of John would come with extra power to the humbler Christians to whom he wrote as they realised that he was no stranger to "tribulation."

The second point to observe is, the sort of tribulation which he had experienced. He had been in Patmos, and he had been there for the Word of God and the testimony of Christ, that is for the same cause for

which they had been suffering and were about to suffer. What was Patmos? A little solitary, rocky island standing out in the Ægean Sea, fifteen miles from Ephesus. John had been banished there for the Word of God, that is, not in order that he might hear the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, though there is something in that, but because he had spoken both. It was his punishment for the crime of being a Christian. For to be a Christian had become a crime in the Roman Empire in the later years of this man's life and under the Emperor Domitian, to which period this book and its experiences may be safely assigned. "Many Christians," says Professor Ramsay, "were condemned to banishment with hard labour. It was a penalty for humbler criminals, provincials and slaves. In its worst form it was a terrible fate, preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground in a dark prison, and work under the lash of a military overseer. It is an unavoidable conclusion that this was John's punishment." So writes the greatest living authority on this subject, and he would be a bold man who would question his conclusion. So we have to think of the great apostle, not pacing the island like Napoleon at St. Helena, in simple solitude, but in surroundings of extreme hardship and misery. All the more force, therefore, is given to the word "tribulation" as he writes it. And all the more remarkable is the expression "*I was in the Spirit.*" It may have been while lying on

the bare ground in worse and more squalid surroundings than his whom we call the "immortal dreamer of Bedford" that these wonderful experiences came.

"I was in the Spirit"; what was it? A state of clairvoyance, an ecstasy, a prophetic trance? Who can tell what the state of the man's body was? He was in the Spirit. "The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me away in the Spirit of the Lord," so wrote Ezekiel of his experiences. And whatever John's outward condition may have been, we may be sure that inwardly he submitted to the influences of the Divine Spirit, who is here now and never far from any of us, and it was in the condition of perfect abandonment to these influences that the vision before us came to him. Mark, it came to no one else. Other exiles shared his captivity, his misery; they heard and saw nothing. He woke in the early dawn from a troubled sleep and realised that it was the Lord's Day, the day of holy memory, and immediately became conscious of another environment and other beings than those by which he was encompassed, and of another world.

And if we would know the whole reason why this man saw and heard what others were blind and deaf to, and what perchance they would have mocked at had he told it to them, we may be sure that he saw and heard what had been on his mind and heart. The things that were of dearest interest to him were the things concerning which he received revelations.

And now the vision itself demands our most close and

reverent attention—the vision of that which became more real to John than all the material things and persons that were about him. There is first a great voice as of a trumpet calling to the soul of the apostle and bidding him realise that what he is about to see is of the utmost importance, not for himself alone, but for others; that it is not to be forgotten, but to be sent to the Church of Christ as he knows it. And at once, as he turns, symbols of those churches appear before him. We are plunged into the midst of symbolism in verses 12-16. Each church is separate from every other. It is not a seven-branched lampstand that John sees, but seven distinct and separate lamps. Each church has its own distinct characteristics as clearly as if it were an individual. There is no church ruling over any other church, but a person in the midst, the true ruler, and the uniting bond of all. Concern ng the *lampstands*, note that each is of gold, the finest, purest, and most precious metal then known, and that the purpose and function of each is very clearly indicated. There is not only costliness, there is service, and that of the highest kind. Your church is to be pure gold, genuine metal, finely and artistically wrought, but all for a purpose—to be a light-bearer. We are quite scriptural when we sing—

"O make Thy Church, dear Saviour,
A lamp of burnished gold,
To bear before the nations
Thy true light as of old."

It is the high function of the Church. All the symbolism

of this chapter that has to do with the Church speaks of light.

There has been a good deal of discussion as to the exact meaning of the angels of the Churches to which the various letters are addressed. Are they the messengers or ministers of the Churches, or what are they? Most likely that view is right which regards the angel of each Church as the personification of its spirit: the angel is so closely identified with the life and character of the Church for one thing, and for another it was no uncommon thing for the coin of a particular province or city to bear on it a figure representing the genius of the city, and it would appeal to these people who were familiar with the idea to personify the character and the spirit of a Church. And here again it will be observed that the function of the personality or personification is to give light. Angels of the Churches are the *stars* hanging from the right hand of Him who walks in the midst of the seven lampstands. From both figures it is clearly manifest that the function of the Church is to bring light to those who would otherwise sit in darkness or walk in the dark. Whether as lamp within or star shining overhead, that is the function of the Church.

Another thing that we may conclude from the symbolism is that the Church depends for her light upon her Lord. If there is not someone to replenish the lamps with oil, there will soon be a smouldering and offensive wick, and then darkness, and He who walks

amid the lampstands walks there for one thing, that He may replenish and keep the lamps burning, while of Him who holds the stars in His right hand we read, "His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength." We may summarise the symbolism of the Churches by saying that (1) wherever there is a Church there should be a lamp and a star to shine for Christ and men. "Ye are the light of the world, let your light shine before men"; and (2) that can only be done as each Church lives under the direct influence of, and in vital connection with, Him who said "I am come a light into the world," and who seeks to live again in every follower of His.

So much for the symbolism of the Churches; but what shall we say of the central figure of this vision, the very sight of whom caused this holy apostle to fall on the ground as one dead? What of the symbols with which the glorified Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, clothed Himself, that His servant in those squalid surroundings might see, and that we who come after might perceive? It is a wonderful figure that is described to us, and on which we are permitted to gaze. The apostle seems to be struggling with words to describe what he saw in his vision on that Lord's Day morning. His language recalls partly the vision recorded in the book of Daniel, the apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, and partly the language of the Evangelists who endeavour to describe what was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration. I go over these particulars—the garment reaching down to the foot implies the dignity of an

official personage; the girdle at the breasts, and not at the loins, indicates the office of a priest, while the brightness that surrounded His head, a crown of light, indicates both holiness and divinity. The eyes as a flame of fire searching and piercing all things stand for His omniscience and tell us that there is nothing hidden from Him. The feet like unto burnished brass indicate strength in action. And then come three symbols which speak of an authority and power: There is the voice which is as the voice of many waters, such a voice as John had listened to awe-stricken as the stormy sea roared around and broke upon that rocky island in the dark and awful night. A voice which drowned and silenced every other voice and sound. Then the voice which was in another sense a sharp sword: "The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword." What for? To discern and judge, to cut away pretence from reality, to lay bare and judge and execute; while the whole face is lighted up with a glory and majesty upon which the eyes of the exiled saint dare not and could not gaze.

And now the question may be asked: Why did He appear thus in so august, so terrible a form to His loved and trusted apostle? For it must be true of the Divine Christ that He could appear robed in other and gentler symbols; why are all the other visions of the book prefaced by this vision? Remember that it was not for himself alone that the vision came to John. What he sees he is to write in a book and send it to the

Churches in Asia, and we may be sure that they needed it. The reality of Christ had become dim ; the dark shadow of the Roman Empire lay gloomy and threatening over every Eastern land. It seemed to be permitted to work its own will. Men needed a vision of the Sovereignty of Christ. And this is what came to John. The Christ who appeared to Him was living and reigning. All power, even over death and Hades, was in His hands. The saints who were swept from the earth by cruel persecution in Rome were but swept into the place of His dominion. He was near, walking in the midst, not of the cities merely, but of the Churches which were the precious parts of the city. A living Christ, all holy and all powerful, the ruler of the kings of the earth, was what the Churches needed to see and John needed to see, and we all need to see. We are apt to forget the kingly Christ in our thought of the pitiful Saviour, but we must not. He is ruler or nothing, and the first sphere of His Sovereignty is the heart of His disciples, and the Body of His disciples, which is His Church. He is here to rule. But what a rule it is. "He laid His right hand upon me saying, 'Fear not.'" To what did His words refer ? Everything. I think I hear Him say to John, "Fear not the power of Rome. I am the First and the Last and the Living One," and to us, His disciples, "Fear not the trouble and temptation and difficulty of to-morrow, the libel, the false accusation, the injustice, for I am, and I am near." The stars are in His right hand protected as well as governed. The

Church and the individual believer are safe in His keeping. I must confess that the word of description in this paragraph that holds me and comforts me is "*like unto a son of man*." That is what He is (and yet so unlike), understanding all and saying to every tired and affrighted servant, "Be not afraid."

THE LETTER TO EPHESUS

Rev. ii. 1—7

This is the first of the seven letters to the Churches in Asia. These letters are different from any other of the New Testament letters. They do not claim to be from John to the Churches, though the whole book is so described (chapter i. 4). They claim rather to be letters of Christ sent through His servant. Then they are all bound up in one book; that is, each letter will go to every Church so that the Church at Ephesus will read the message of the Lord to the Church in Laodicea and the Church at Smyrna that to the Church in Sardis, etc., and undoubtedly they will be read by other Churches in Asia which the seven here represent, for there were many other Churches in Asia. Colossæ was one of them. Paul wrote a letter to Colossæ, and at the end of it he said, "When this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans, and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea."

The probability is that the seven Churches named belonged to the principal cities in Asia, that each was the centre of a district, postal or commercial, and would form a rallying point for the Churches of its district, where on important occasions the representatives of the

Churches could meet. Moreover, Ephesus, the first city to be named, was not only the principal city in Asia at that time—a thriving, busy seaport town, and the centre of the worship of Diana, where stood her temple, one of the seven wonders of the world—it was also the gateway to the Asian province, and the port at which the Roman governors entered. Any messenger going to Asia from Patmos, or from Rome, would naturally land at Ephesus; and what is more, if he kept to the great trade routes, he would come to the other cities mentioned here in the order in which they stand, Ephesus first, Laodicea last, thus making a circle and returning to Ephesus. Ignatius, who wrote a letter to this Church, referring to those who passed on their way to Rome to suffer martyrdom, called Ephesus "the passage-way of those who are slain unto God." So in the natural order of things Ephesus stands first on the list. You remember the history of the Christian Church within the city, that Paul preached there on his way to Jerusalem, leaving behind him Priscilla and Aquila. Apollos, the eloquent, succeeded him. Paul returned again and was allowed to preach for three months in the synagogue, afterwards for two years in a hired building called the school of Tyrannus. Subsequently Timothy became the pastor of the Church, and he seems to have been succeeded by the apostle John, who, according to tradition, spent many years in the city, and died there. So it is to this city and to this Church of considerable standing that the first of the seven letters is addressed.

Note how it begins—with a description of Him who sends the letter, a description which repeats two characteristics which John had observed in the vision of his glorified Lord. Each letter begins with a description of Christ, and, though there is some similarity between the opening of the Ephesus and the Sardis letters, each differs from all the others. But if you take the seven descriptions of Christ in the letters, you will get the whole of the description which John gives in chapter i. We may be sure that there is something in such description appropriate to the condition of the Church to which it is sent. The message to Ephesus is from "Him who holdeth the seven stars, and walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." It has to do, therefore, entirely with the Church's function as the transmitter of light and its connection in this respect with its Lord, who is at once the source and replenisher of its light.

Now let us see what He has to say of this Church.

1. There are two whole verses filled with things set down to its credit. "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience." Do not the opening words at once remind us of Paul's words to the Thessalonian Christians, "remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." We see at once how eagerly the inspired writers—representing the mind and method of Christ—seize upon everything that is good in those to whom they write, and set it down first. But do you not see another thing in these words? They are the same words as those used by Paul, but

there is a difference, and the difference is significant and important. Here we have works, labour, patience, that is all. There we have work of faith, labour of love, patience of hope. It is very significant that the words that are left out are vital. The husk is there, the kernel is gone; the body is there, the spirit has fled; work, labour, endurance are there, the spirit which first prompted and inspired them is no longer. But we may go on. "Thou canst not bear evil men." There is signified a jealousy for the morals of the Church, a determination that no evil liver should bring stain and disgrace on its fair name. There was a high moral standard in the Church, far different from the standard which apparently prevailed in Pergamum. Whoever the evil man might be, whatever his standing in the city, or his wealth, the Church could not bear him, and if we knew all the truth about Ephesus, we should discover doubtless that the Church prided itself on its lofty moral tone.

Nor was it the moral purity of the Church alone that was jealously guarded; its theological and doctrinal purity was equally protected. There passed through Ephesus, as the gateway of the province, travelling teachers—and some of them were pretenders—anxious, for their own ends or for sectarian and ecclesiastical reasons, to exploit and make gain of the Church. But on whomsoever they might impose, they had no chance with the Ephesians. They submitted all the would-be teachers who appeared to so severe an ordeal that

impostors were detected. Keen eyes and ears for heresy had the members of the Church at Ephesus, and they are commended by the Lord for their zeal, for the purity of the Church, and for their faith.

Then, again, the Church could endure and bear. It had almost fiery zeal for truth and purity, intolerance for evil men. And there went along with this the steadier qualities of endurance. "Thou hast patience and didst bear"—even without growing weary—"for My name's sake." The third verse does not say what was borne; whatever it was, it was for "the sake of the name," and it would probably be reproach and suffering, injustice and disability. These had been endured with no sign of giving in or giving way. Refusing to tolerate moral evil within its own borders, it endured the long strain of evil put upon it for the sake of Christ, and showed no sign of weariness. Firmly loyal to conviction the Church had stood through the storm.

And, still further, passing for a moment to verse 6, there is one other thing to be set down to the credit of this Church. "Thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans." They were one with their Lord in that. What the Nicolaitans were it is impossible, definitely, to say. Probably people who introduced into the Church some dangerous form of heresy which permitted the practice of immorality, and the Church at Ephesus had set its face fiercely against the works of these people.

Well, we have there a list of excellencies for which any Church might well be thankful, and one would

almost say of which any Church might reasonably be proud. Work, labour, patience, intolerance of evil, zeal for truth, hatred of impurity, fidelity to principle amid suffering and reproach. What a list of virtues and achievements, far more and longer than those of any other Church mentioned, and they are all gladly noted by the Lord of the Church. And you would say—if you knew of such a Church to-day—that, considering the surroundings in the midst of which it stood, it was a moral miracle, and as near perfection as any human community could be.

2. The astonishing thing therefore in this letter, and the part of it that would take away the breath of the members when the message was read, is that such a Church as this, with all these undeniable and commendable virtues, should be spoken of as a "fallen Church"; that a Church that had lifted its head proudly among the Churches for its purity and zeal and fidelity should be regarded as a Church that had need of repentance and humiliation before God. And yet that is the language of the letter. It reveals our Master's methods. He will set everything down to our credit that can be set down. And He will set it down first. But He will set down the other things also. The blacks as well as the whites, as Rutherford would say. You know your failing, my brother and sister, in this respect. You love to be told of your virtues—it encourages you, you say—but you cannot bear to be spoken to of your failings, and when you are sharply reprimanded for

them, you feel like throwing all excellencies to the winds and becoming reckless. You know how we resent being found fault with, how we tend to satisfaction with ourselves and our children and our Church, and we almost hate people who dare to say "but" when the praises of our children are sung. And then you know, on the other hand, there are some people who see in you and your Church and your family nothing but the fault; they have always their finger on the defects, and never say a word about the good which you know to be there. Be sure that our Lord will deal faithfully with all there is in us. He will tell us to our faces of the good, and then of the bad. He enumerates the virtues of the Ephesian Church, and then says "but." I know all that is good, "but"—and what a "but" it is! how it arrests our attention and causes us to listen! "But I have against thee"—much *for* thee, this *against* thee—"thou didst leave thy first love." There are three verses of virtues, there is only one brief line of defect, no multiplying of words, but you may be sure that it would be the one part of the letter that would linger longest in the mind and memory of the Church.

And now will you observe on what our Master lays stress, here and always. It is on *love*. That is the vital thing; not correctness of opinion and belief, nor contention for the same; not zeal for the purity of the Church. You may have these and pride yourself on them. You may pity the laxity of modern people. You may denounce the heresies of your time with a

very sharp tongue, and be reckoned a pillar of orthodoxy. But if behind and through all this there be not love, the heretic you pity and blame may be more Christian than you. One recalls the immortal words of Paul in 1 Cor. xiii., "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, and if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries, and have all faith, and bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." I am struck with this feature in the Ephesian letter. They could hate, but they had forgotten how to love. And I am impressed with the fact that a vast amount of work can be done without love, all the things, in fact, mentioned here. Some can preach, others can teach, and we can all give, we can contend for truth and purity, and make a most brave show, and all the time the vital element may be lacking.

What is more, love can be lost—that is perfectly clear. We are not dealing here with people who had never loved, but with those who had gone back on their love and gone away from it, we do not know when or how. Probably gradually, imperceptibly: they had been so busy working in the world and in the Church, that they had neglected the cultivation of this most precious grace. And it is the danger of our time and the weakness of our time. There is no lack of work being done of one sort or other, but there is lack in our modern Christian life of that personal love for Christ which glowed in the breast of Paul and John, of

Samuel Rutherford and John Bunyan, and of the saints of a century ago. We are correct, but we are passionless. We do not realise what Christ has done for us, and what He waits and yearns to do for others. The glories of our Redeemer, the bliss of belonging to Him, the thought of what we owe to Him, these do not cause our hearts to break forth into rapturous and exultant thanksgiving and gladness as they should. Material abundance has blinded the eyes of some of us to the value of spiritual things. The things of this world are the things that evoke our enthusiasm. We ought to listen to a word like this and ask, Lord, is it I? Comparing my past with my present—thinking of my life when I was first brought to Christ—how I loved my Saviour, was never absent from the services of the sanctuary, never neglected my Bible, enjoyed my prayer, kept watch over my spirit; so felt my indebtedness to Him who had delivered me from eternal death, that to serve and give was the greatest privilege and joy—can I say that it is so with me now? Is it not true that the responsibilities of life, its struggles, its disappointments, its honours, its advancements, have crowded out love? I have a far greater opinion of myself and my importance than I used to have, but have I lost my love? No one can read a message like this without searching his own heart, and it would be the greatest blessing if every member of the Church would do it. For here is a whole Church that has declined. We may help each other to lower the

spiritual tone of a whole community, and deteriorate all together. "He that hath an ear," do not let him close it, "let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

3. Suppose an honest opening of our hearts should reveal the fact that we had suffered this loss. What then? First, there is hope: the case is serious, but if it be taken seriously there may be recovery. The failing can be corrected, the enthusiasm revived. There are three counsels given. The first is "Remember." If some of us would let memory take us by the hand to-day and lead us back to the time that is gone, it might lead to the greatest personal blessing. Then "Repent," which does not mean sighing and grieving over declension, but turning right round. And the third counsel is "Do the first works," which is really beginning again to cultivate the life for Christ, to do all things for His sake, to glorify Him, to learn of Him how to live and to live to Him.

But if not, what? It is easy to see that the situation is critical; there is an alternative to repentance and a new beginning. Things cannot remain as they are. Here is the alternative. "I will remove thy lampstand out of its place." Professor Ramsay takes a less serious view of this warning than some have taken. He shows how in a quite remarkable way Ephesus had been a city of change—it has occupied three different sites at least, and now the modern village stands on the earliest site. The gulf—which was a great inlet of the sea—is now a

broad level valley, and the harbour from which John was deported to Patmos a reedy marsh. The very landscape has changed. To move the lampstand from its place would be like shifting the site of the city, and perhaps the scattering of the Church to begin its life somewhere else over again. It may seem presumptuous in a simple man like the writer to differ from so profound a scholar as Ramsay. I have mentioned his statements that the facts which he mentions may be known. But I am bound to confess my failure to see how they mitigate the seriousness of the warning. To remove the lampstand out of its place must mean that the place which knew it then would know it no more. And the most natural interpretation is that, if the lampstand ceased to fulfil its function, which was to give light to the city, to fling abroad the light of love to God, to the brotherhood, to men, it would pass away. Useless in Ephesus, it would be useless anywhere; it would cease to be one of the lampstands amid which the Son of Man walked. A light might spring up in another place, as when the Church, ceasing in the East, sprang up in the West. But the Church there would cease, as indeed it did. I know of few more serious reflections than that which comes to me from the perusal of this warning. It may explain—if we only got to the root of things—the decay and disappearance of some churches in London. You say people worked and worked until they lost heart. Perhaps they lost love, and failed to see that it is not work that keeps a church alive, but our fellowship

of love with Christ and with men, the abandonment of life to His control. I recall some words of the Master in the days of His flesh, and put them by the side of these, applying them to the individual. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away." It is a word of warning for every disciple to lay to heart.

The message to Ephesus does not end with a warning, but with a promise. It is couched in terms that meet us often in this book:—"To him that overcometh." What is there to overcome in a man who has lost love? Pride, reluctance, self-sufficiency, the world that has gained on him, himself. But he can do it by the grace of God. And even the man who has lost his love and the Eden of bliss that it made for him may come back and eat again of the tree of life. You know that trees were worshipped in Græco-Asiatic cities, and the belief was widely entertained that the tree was a kind of intermediary between the human and the Divine, that the life of a man was supposed to be connected with a tree, coming from it and returning to it, and there may be something in the illustration to suggest that eating of the tree of life would be feeding upon the Divine power and nature. Or, better still, that a man who had repented and overcome, fighting his way back by persistent faith to the position which he had lost, would come back into the Eden which he had lost, the place where God walked and talked with man. His life would not then be a life of work and labour and patience, of detecting evil and fighting against it, merely: but a

life of blissful fellowship, out of which all these would easily spring. He would partake daily of that which would renew his life and make him strong for service. His flickering light would be kept steady and strong by the ministry of Christ to his own soul.

This is the portion of all who repent and do the great work of believing on Christ. It may even be the portion of those who have lost their love.

THE LETTER TO SMYRNA

Rev. ii. 8—11

The letter to the Church in Smyrna stands almost alone. The city itself lay north of Ephesus round a bold headland, and on the shore of a deep gulf or inlet of the sea. It disputed the claim to be the chief city of the province Asia with Ephesus and Pergamum, as perhaps Glasgow would dispute with Edinburgh the claim to be the chief city of Scotland. It was as wealthy and flourishing as Ephesus. But I do not suppose that the Christian Church in Smyrna would have entered for a moment into a contest with the Church in Ephesus for the claim to be called the principal Church. It had not the history of the Church in Ephesus, nor had it the same list of achievements. The word "works" is omitted from the Revised Version for the simple reason that it is not in the oldest MSS. It was interpolated by some copyist later on, who either thought that the Church at Smyrna should have the credit of "works," or who followed slavishly the greeting of the Lord to most of the other Churches; but we may be sure that the Revisers are right. And the inference that I, at any rate, draw, is that there were no works to chronicle. A "*work*" is a finished product, like a

building, or a mission, or a project; and my suggestion is that the Church in Smyrna was too poor and too oppressed and persecuted to carry out any great schemes and plans. It had had all its work to keep itself alive and to keep itself together. The first word of Christ to it, therefore, is "*I know thy tribulation and thy poverty*," and these are mentioned first probably because the Church felt them most keenly. Trouble and poverty, how often they are keenly felt by the saints of God, what a barrier they seem against what we call Christian work. How they thrust us back from doing and giving. And the Church at Smyrna was a poor Church, a *very* poor Church; the word poverty has in Grimm's Lexicon as its primary rendering "*beggary*," destitution; and that was the thing about the Church at Smyrna that the Lord notices first—that and its trouble were its chief characteristics. Poor and despised it was; and it was no honour, probably, in the Christian world, not to speak of other society, to belong to it. Very often, may be, the members of the Church at Smyrna looked with envious eyes to Ephesus in the south, or to Laodicea in the east, who was saying, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing."

There is much in this letter that will not apply to numbers of churches to-day, but there are many churches to whom much in it would apply. I know something about poor churches. I visit them often, and I know how they look with envious eyes towards a London suburban church. I know about the village manse on the

bleak hillside, with its keen struggle to provide the bare necessaries of life ; the brave woman within doors who performs the miracle of making the meagre income stretch over the needs of the year—who shares her husband's toils and anxieties and sorrows. I know the little meeting-house which the wealthy pass by.

I know the social obloquy which still rests on the Free Church minister and his little flock in many parts of rural England, and how often only the poorest, most insignificant and despised care or dare to belong to the little conventicle of dissenters. And I know how difficult it is to keep the heart at its best under circumstances such as these, to feel that the work is of the first importance when it is a momentous consideration whether a new bench can be bought, or a new stove, or a door may be painted. And when I see such people as I saw in such a building recently, with their trusted pastor and leader, when I have heard their responses in prayer, and seen the light that never was on land or sea on the faces of hard-working men and women, I have thanked God for these little companies of people gathered throughout our land, and one has seemed almost to hear the words of the Master to His Church, "I know thy tribulation and thy poverty—but thou art rich." Hath not God chosen the poor of this world *rich in faith?* One thanked God for the privilege of ministering to such.

But there are everywhere *individuals* to whom such a message as this would come with power. People in

tribulation and poverty who are thrust back from doing what they would, and giving what they would. Tribulation, pressure from without, and straitened means within; serious and pressing and wearing anxieties. And it is something to hear the Master say, as assuredly we might if we heard all, "*I know* thy tribulation and thy poverty." That is to say, "I know the things that hinder, that cripple, that paralyse the otherwise willing hand."

> "All I aspired to be
> All men ignored in me,
> That I was worth to God."

And it is a still greater thing if we can hear Him say "*but* thou art rich"; what a different "*but*" from that to the Church in Ephesus. There it was—"I know thy works, etc., etc., *but* I have against thee." Here the little conjunction ushers in a most illuminating sentence. It is the one word of commendation spoken to this Church which receives no word of blame; and it is enough. *He* says it and there is no revoking of His estimate. I suppose a part of the tribulation of the Smyrnæans was the blasphemy of the Jews, which does not mean cursing God but reviling and libelling man, and the unmistakable import of the passage is this: the Jews in Smyrna were the bitter opponents of the Christian faith, and were falsely accusing them. It is quite likely indeed that the Jews were the instigators of the persecution of the Christians in many places. And it is most interesting to remember that it was in this

city that Polycarp, the disciple of John, suffered martyrdom, and that in the account left us of his martyrdom we are told that it was the Jews of Smyrna who were most eager in collecting faggots for the burning of this aged saint, who refused to save his life by renouncing his Lord. There is also peculiar force in this passage when we remember that He from whom it came *knew*, not as one who watches merely, but as one who had passed through poverty, tribulation, the reviling of His countrymen who delivered Him into the hands of the Gentiles.

For the rest it is instructive to note that the people who behave thus forfeit their nationality. They say they are Jews, they are not: "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, of the spirit and not of the letter." And the men who can revile and libel the followers of Christ have lost the spirit of the covenant and forfeited all their inheritance. They are the synagogue of Satan, for they are doing his work, and we belong to him whose work we do. The man who does the devil's work may be called a Christian. He may light the fires of persecution inflamed by what he calls zeal for the truth, but all the time he is the servant of Satan and to his synagogue he belongs.

2. One of the striking things about this letter is its indirect but certain teaching on the subject of a malignant spirit of evil and his power to injure Christian

people. He can work through the Jews for the reviling of the Christians and through the Empire for their martyrdom. "The devil is about to cast some of you into prison and ye shall have tribulation ten days"— a definite and short period, which will come to an end.

The obvious agent in casting them into prison was the Roman Empire and Emperor ; the divinely inspired message says *it is the devil*—who is to be permitted to reach these people through the Emperor and for their physical hurt and torture. But what a declaration this is coming to these people from their Master. You would have thought that when He said "I know thy tribulation and thy revilers, etc.," He would have gone on to say "And I will smite them with helplessness and deliver thee." But He does not. The outlook is as gloomy as it can be. They are about to suffer more heavily than ever ; their enemies are apparently to prevail. They are to be cast into prison ; and let us remember that the Roman Empire did not imprison for punishment as we do. They would not burden the State with the support of a number of prisoners. Every man who was in prison was there awaiting either his trial or his death. His trial would end in acquittal, or scourging, or fine, or exile, or death. And the irresistible inference to be drawn from verse 10 is that some of these poor, struggling, much maligned Christians would be called upon to seal their testimony with their blood. "Be thou faithful *unto* (not *until*) death" is the message, not merely through tribulation and poverty

and slander, but up to the point of dying. So that Christ draws near to this Church as He draws near to some of His disciples to-day with this message, "Thou art about to suffer." As to the problem, that may not be capable of being unravelled, it is perfectly inexplicable; there is no other way, no other way that God can take to the ultimate righting of things, no other way to the crown of life; "you must suffer," is His message, "or else be unfaithful." There is no other way to escape suffering save by being untrue, and the message is, "Be thou true and let the devil do his worst."

There can be no doubt that the crown of suffering came to these people through their refusal to obey the law. Allegiance to Christ their only Lord forbade their obedience to the law which commanded them to worship the Emperor as the genius of the spirit of Rome. If Polycarp had consented to do it he would have saved his life, but he could not. And these men were the pioneers of the men who have continued until now, who refuse to render to Cæsar the things that are God's, and who, when the law meddles in matters of faith and worship, say, We cannot obey it. It is a terrible reflection that the influence of the devil can work through synagogues and states; but apparently it can, and when it does the faithful are bound to become passive sufferers.

3. Now note what our Lord says about this suffering; the whole of the letter bears on it.

They are not to be afraid, to shrink and blench from the fearful ordeal. It is Spartan counsel that He gives.

But there it is. He is no soft and indulgent leader who would melt the waxen hearts of men. "The thing to be dreaded," He seems to say, "is not suffering but untruthfulness." You can see the end of suffering, you can never see the end of being untrue. All suffering for truth's sake, for a noble principle, ends in light, light to the sufferer, light to those who come after him. Moreover, *Death*, the shadow feared of man, is really not to be dreaded. It is not death to the faithful. Our Lord's reference to Himself standing at the head of the letter is full of meaning. "*I am the first and the last.*" Before your enemies, I was, and after them I shall be. They come and work their will and go. I remain, and thou, if thou art faithful; and if they do their worst they do but bring us together in a sweeter union.

Then "*I became dead and lived.*" This sentence is remarkable, and is not adequately rendered in either of our versions. "*I became a corpse, and yet I lived*"; not merely lived again, but lived in spite of death. There is power in this reference. The Smyrnæan Christians would remember how the Lord became dead. The betrayal, the arrest, the trial, the mocking and reviling and scourging, the thorn-crowned sufferer led to the awful agony of the Cross; they had heard the story of it all, but that physical part was not death. So, the executioner's sword, the blazing faggot, the still ashes, the torn and lacerated and motionless frame, these are not death. They seem to be, but Jesus said, "He that believeth on Me shall *never die*. If any man

keep My sayings he shall never see death." There *is* a death that hurts, of which this violent death is a type. He that *overcometh* shall escape it and know nothing of its horrors. There is another reference. There was a time when Smyrna seemed to be dead. Six centuries before Christ the Lydians captured the city and destroyed it, and it was 340 years before it was reconstituted, and yet the historian says it never died, its ancient spirit existed in the villages into which it was scattered. It seemed to be destroyed, it was refounded in greater splendour than in former times, has lived on and flourished, and is to-day the one great and flourishing city in that part of Asia. Things are not what they seem. The Church that seemed to be poor is rich, and the Church which said "I am rich" was declared to be poor and wretched, blind and naked. The man who seems to be dead is living, not only in another world, but in this, where the influence of his fidelity will live and work on for many generations. And the man that seems to be living and prospering is in God's sight dead while he lives. The man who is faithful to God can never be killed. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

There is a reference to Smyrna's history in the words *Be thou faithful*, which every Christian in the city would understand. In the days before Rome became an Empire, while it was yet a Republic, and before the Eastern cities had learned that Rome was the supreme power in the world, Smyrna had taken sides with her

against Carthage and the Seleucid Kings. And in those early days, during one of the Roman wars, a Smyrnæan assembly, hearing of the distressed condition of Rome's army, stripped off their own clothes and sent them to the soldiers. And in the days of Rome's greatness the city which had taken her side in earlier days was not forgotten, but was known as *the faithful.* What the city had been to the State, that the Church is urged to be to her Lord.

There is another probable reference. Ramsay tells us that the situation of Smyrna is extremely beautiful. He calls it the city of life, and its life and brightness are the characteristics that impress a visitor at once. It has been likened in shape to a glorious statue sitting with its feet in the sea. Until within a few years the hill into which the city runs back, and which may be likened to the head of the statue, was crowned with the ruins of what had been a magnificent and apparently impregnable castle. It was called the Garland or Crown of Smyrna, and one of its great teachers besought the citizens not to be satisfied with a crown of buildings, but to strive to have as its crown pure, patriotic, just and good men. These, he said, are the true garland of a city, its prize, its mark of supremacy—not stone walls, but true and pure citizens.

The crown of life may mean many things. It may mean life in abundance, or life that resists all attacks, as the castle on the hill Pagos resisted attacks and defended the life of Smyrna. Fulness of life and life for evermore it means, and the best and richest prize of life.

And it is laid up for the Church in Smyrna, the highest reward that heaven has to give. Only one thing can keep Smyrna from the crown, namely, the unfaithfulness of Smyrna, nothing else. This poor struggling, persecuted, despised Church, wearing here the crown of sorrow and suffering, would come, not to heaven, as I take it, but to the supreme joy of it; not to life, but to the very crown of life; not to the city, but to the supreme height of the city.

Were they faithful? We do not know. We know that Polycarp was, in the year 155; we may hope and believe that others were. At any rate this is significant: Ephesus, threatened with the removal of the lampstand, has become an insignificant village. I do not know whether there is a Church in it. Smyrna is a city of 250,000 inhabitants. It has suffered much from many invaders, and has endured the cruelty and greed of many conquerors, but it has arisen brilliant and strong from every disaster. So has the Church within its walls, and three-fourths of Smyrna's population is Christian. It is called by the Mohammedans, who number less than one-fourth of the population, "infidel Smyrna," and so it seems likely to remain.

It would seem as if, not in heaven, but on earth also, the crown of life is given to the faithful; that the influence of fidelity to Jesus Christ and conscience is immortal; that the man who suffers for the little while, who endures loss and wrong for the sake of Christ, missing the prizes of this world, its money and honour

and applause, receives a richer meed. Meanwhile, He whom such souls serve stands near at hand to say, "I know it all, trust Me, be faithful. A little way only canst thou see. I who see all declare that all is well with the faithful heart. Well now and well for ever." Not one word of blame has the Lord for this poor Church. It has His commendation and promise of immortality. May a like reward be ours.

THE LETTER TO PERGAMUM

Rev. ii. 12—17

Fifty miles north of Smyrna, as Smyrna was fifty miles north of Ephesus, stood the city of Pergamum. Not on the coast, but fifteen miles inland. Its situation was superb. It stood on an enormous rocky hill, and the first exclamation of Ramsay when he saw the magnificent sight was "*A royal city.*" And a royal city it had been. Its history reached back to the beginning of life in Asia. For a century and a half it had been a kingdom—the Pergamene Kingdom; in 33 B.C. Attalus had bequeathed it to the Romans, who had made it the capital of the province Asia. In the day when this letter came to the Church the city was declining, and was in danger of being eclipsed by Ephesus and Smyrna. But it was still the official capital. All this has to do with the letter to the Church. The aspect of our Lord which is turned towards the Church is that of authority. "He that hath the sharp-pointed two-edged sword"—the sword used in the Roman army, and not the scimitar of the East—the man who bare the sword was the man who wielded the power of life and death. The sharp-pointed Roman sword with the two edges was the symbol of authority. Official rescripts would come

from Rome to Pergamum, and through Pergamum to the rest of the province. It was the city of authority. And to the Church in it an authoritative message comes.

And the Church had had a hard time of it; that is quite evident from the letter. So hard a time that, like the Church in Smyrna, there are no works mentioned. Just as the most prominent thing, the first to be remembered, in Smyrna was its poverty and trouble, so the first thing to be realised by anyone who thought of the Church in Pergamum from outside, as John thought of it in Patmos, was its difficult situation—right under the shadow of the imperial power. The official seat of Roman authority was there. The men who wore the sharp-pointed two-edged swords went past the Church; and the Pergamene Christians saw every day the frowning walls of the Roman garrison, official residences and court of justice. And it was a desperate business to be a Christian in Pergamum and to keep a Christian Church together. A struggling Protestant Church, say, in the city of Brussels or Rome; a Baptist or Primitive Methodist Church in a very small English cathedral city, is not expected to have great works to show. You do not expect to find palatial buildings and great public esteem and the company of the rich and powerful there. And there is great significance in the greeting of Christ to this Church: "I know where thou dwellest; I take everything into my account." Locality has much to do with a Church's life. There are some neighbourhoods where it would be a mystery if the Church were

not thriving; things go on automatically. The people who want to attend your services are at your very doors. People willing and able and eager to work are at your hand. There is money and talent and energy and character, and the minister finds himself surrounded by such a body of officers and so numerous and intelligent a congregation, that everything calls out the best in him, and all his utterances are enhanced in value by the atmosphere in which they are spoken. And the man knows that he often gets honour that is not his due.

There are other localities where it is almost a miracle to find a thriving Church, and where a Church with great works to show is an impossibility. The congested centres of our great cities, the dreary and monotonous streets from which the well-to-do people have moved away, where people have the heart taken out of them by the squalor of their surroundings and the awful struggle for existence, where poverty and vice reign, and an indifference which nothing seems able to pierce. That and the stagnant village from which all the young and eager life is drained away and only the stolid and unenterprising are left; where there is a dearth of workers and never the inspiration of numbers; where there is social scorn for the members of the Church, and sometimes persecution: where the name of "Church" is denied, and the bitterest sectarian spirit rules outside, and arts of the lowest and most contemptible kind are practised to prevent the people from following their

convictions and to stay the progress of the little community. And in each case and to each one of His disciples the message of the Lord would be: "I know where thou dwellest," *thou* in the favoured place, and *thou* in the midst of struggle; thou with the favouring winds filling thy sails, on an open sea; and thou in the midst of rocks and mists, with the storm beating down upon thy prow. I know, and judge and expect accordingly.

"*Thou dwellest where Satan's throne is.*" It was a wonder that there was a Christian Church in Pergamum at all, when you consider all things. Whatever Satan's throne may mean besides, and it may likely imply that Pergamum was the seat of some cult of evil practice, there may be some reference to the cult of Æsculapius, the god of medicine, with its inquiry into and discussion of the secret springs of life, some foul and polluting influence which emanated from Pergamum. The probability, however, is that the chief reference is to the Roman Government, whose local throne was in Pergamum. It seems a bold thing to identify the throne of Rome with the *throne of Satan.* Practically the same thing is done in the previous letter (verse 10): "*The devil is about to cast some of you into prison*" unquestionably means that they are to be immured by order of the Government. And there was something worthy of being classed among the deep things of Satan in the policy of Rome. In Pergamum stood the Temple of Augustus. It was the chief centre of the worship of the Emperor,

which was now demanded of the citizens. A refusal to worship was interpreted as a proof of disloyalty to the throne, as refusal to obey a single law has often been interpreted. It was an abominable regulation, which brought the Christians under a charge of treason, for no people were more loyal to the throne than they. To bow to the statue of the Emperor would be to compromise their loyalty to Christ, and they had refused. They were grossly misunderstood, and falsely accused, and they had been compelled to suffer. Antipas, for the crime of being a Christian, had fallen a martyr, and he was probably the representative of many others who had fallen. And there was no knowing who would be accused next, who next would be called out and commanded to worship the Emperor, called a law-breaker and charged with disloyalty to the throne, and fined or exiled or killed for treason. And in the midst of all this peril and wicked misrepresentation the Church had remained faithful. There is manifest delight expressed in the words "Thou holdest fast My name," and even in the hottest trial "didst not deny My faith." The example of the Church and the commendation of the Lord, who never loses sight of any good thing, should prove an immense encouragement to all who are serving Christ in difficult places, and whose loyalty is bringing them into trouble. We need not be afraid of hard names, nor complain of a little misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Above all, these must not be allowed to drive us from our firm loyalty. Woe to the

man, whatever he gains by it, who is driven by the shadow of threat or danger from the position of fidelity to conviction and to Christ; and blessed he who remains faithful. The pleasure of the Lord is with him, and with a sympathy which is worth more than all the favour of the world He is saying "I know where thou dwellest, and that thou art faithful."

2. It is extremely significant that concerning this Church that had suffered and had clung to principle the Lord is troubled. Its fidelity is the first thing He sees, but not the only thing. You cannot live on one virtue alone, especially if there is something that is inimical to virtue allowed side by side with it. When shall we understand that in the Church of Christ you cannot balance a wrong against a right and say that the one compensates for the other, or that one may grow up unnoticed, or remain because the other is there. We have to do with One who is filled with a passion for perfection. "A holy Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" is the demand. So while He is merciful on one side, He is unyielding on the other. And He says to this Church, "But I have a few things against thee." He calls this Church to repentance. It is true the Church as a whole has not gone astray, but the whole Church is charged and called to repent on behalf of some who are allowed within its borders. And what is the matter with these people? They hold the teaching of Balaam. You remember the history of that strange and unhappy man. How Balak, King of Moab, a believer in charms and

incantations, had summoned him to come and curse Israel, sending messengers with rewards. It is clear from the remarkable narrative that Balaam wanted to go for the sake of the reward. He started, and on the way was reproved by the ass that he rode on, and alarmed by an angel. He wanted to return, but was bidden to proceed. Then, to the amazement of the man who had hired him—from whichever point of view he took him—he blessed instead of cursing Israel. That is generally all that is remembered about Balaam. People forget that his dead body was found after a battle, and that he died fighting in the ranks of Israel's enemies. Then in the same chapter (Numb. xxxi.), which tells that significant fact, there is this further passage, "These (that is, the women of Moab) caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor." And the matter of Peor was this (Numb. xxv. 1, 2)—the people of Moab, on the advice of Balaam, had successfully enticed the people of Israel to their licentious feasts with which unclean and abominable practices were connected, and it had been done under the counsel of Balaam who could utter some of the finest sentiments and was supposed to be a prophet. Here, then, was the peril of the Church at Pergamum. It allowed people who taught the doctrine of Balaam, which was that the people whom God had blessed, who were His elect, could do no wrong and could presume upon their covenant relation to God. It was Antinomianism that

was being taught and practised by a minority of the Church at Pergamum.

In what way it was practised we cannot tell. It could scarcely have been that they were engaging in the worship of the Emperor. On that point they were firm as adamant; it may very well have been, however, that in some other directions they were being plied by people within their own borders to mitigate the rigour of their life by mingling with the people of the city in some of the practices which were contrary to the pure teaching of Christ and hateful in His sight. The argument might well have been: We have declared our loyalty to Christ by refusing the national ritual. That is beyond question therefore. Now, surely, if we are not to be cut off from society altogether we may allow ourselves licence in this direction or that. And it may be that this minority were allowing themselves, and counselling others, to participate in practices of Pergamum which were even worse than the bowing, with mental reservation, in the temple of Augustus.

One or two points emerge from this reference. One is that *the life of a Christian should be all of a piece*, loyal to Christ in everything. Brave and resolute to the point of suffering in refusing compliance with a wrong law or custom, and never vituperative and abusive to those who are the cause of your suffering. Separate from the world in steadfast observance and maintenance of the ordinances of religion, in refraining from questionable amusements and entertainments, and also separate

from the world in the method of conducting business, being free from the grasping, the hardness, the unscrupulousness, the greed and meanness, that bring more discredit on the faith than error in creed. In public and private, on Sundays and week-days, in work and in play, in matters ecclesiastical and domestic, let a man be loyal to Christ.

Another point is that there may be *more danger from within than from without.* The Church in Pergamum was in greater peril from a few people within than from the Roman Empire. "I am afraid of my friends," said a prominent politician once, "not of my opponents"; and the Church has had occasion to be afraid of its friends, the people who have crept in and brought their worldly ways with them and who are tolerated because they are agreeable or clever, or good-natured, or rich. It is not the persecutor from without that the Church has most to fear, but the unworthy liver within, the slack, unprincipled, convictionless man whose influence is devoted to obliterating the lines which must divide the believer from the unbeliever, the pleasures of the senses from those of the spirit.

3. Thirdly, we consider *the charge of the Lord.* The first part of it refers to this evil-working minority, for so I understand the word "repent," and the alternative is, "I come to thee quickly, and will fight against *them*"—not against *thee*—"with the sword of my mouth." Which seems to say, "*If you do not deal with these people I shall,*" and the way to deal with them would

probably be openly to repudiate their practices instead of smiling upon them. And the unmistakable conclusion is that it is better for the offender himself that you should dissociate yourself from his practice and express your disapproval, than, by weak compliance, allow him to come under the judgment of Christ. To be silent concerning a thing you know to be evil, for the sake of keeping a friend or the peace, may be the greatest unkindness to him as well as a general injury. *To openly blame and denounce the evil may save a soul from death.*

The letter closes with a wonderful promise to him that overcometh—not merely the threats of evil by his fearlessness—but its allurements, by his constancy. *He is to eat of the hidden manna.* The phrase may have a reference to the secret and mysterious pleasures to be learned in the practices of Pergamum, or to the tradition which existed among the Jews, that the ark in which the pot of manna was would be discovered when the Messiah came. It certainly means that he who will be loyal to Christ, though he may have to forfeit the gains and pleasures and honours by which the children of the world live, shall have food to eat that they know not of, and be sustained by the hand of God, who in the secret of His presence feeds and satisfies the faithful soul.

The white stone with the name written on it has come in for a great deal of discussion, and no one can dogmatically assert what it means. We have to think of the

usage of the times. A white stone was given in token of acquittal in a court of justice. A stone with a device on it was given to ensure admission to certain banquets or meetings. And yet again a stone inscribed with certain characters would, in popular and Eastern superstition, like the fabled lamp, serve to open closed doors and keep safe the person of him who could understand it, and would secure him entrance to Paradise. The custom is probably used here as an illustration. The *white* stone indicates purity. It symbolises the power to summon to the side of him who possesses it, not sprite or ginn, but the heavenly Friend and Paraclete. There is a secret of the Lord imparted to those who have not defiled themselves with the doings of this world, a language which they alone can speak, and which cannot be imitated. A true shibboleth which no man can say who has not been taught by the Spirit of God, a password into the heavenly Jerusalem and the innumerable company of angels and the bliss of the redeemed. And the reality which lies beneath the figure of the white stone with the name on it is the white soul made and kept clean by the energy of the blood of Christ and the power of the Spirit of God, on which soul God has written the name of ownership which the world can neither read nor understand.

THE LETTER TO THYATIRA

Rev. ii. 18—29

We have here the middle letter of the seven to the Churches in Asia. It is the longest, most obscure and most difficult. First, because we have no history to guide us. Unlike Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum, Thyatira has no history. We have been pursuing our way north from Ephesus to Pergamum. Now we turn south or south-east and find all the rest of the Churches in that direction until, when we are at Laodicea we are exactly east of Ephesus. All that we know of Thyatira is that it was famous for its manufactures; that Lydia, the merchant woman, the seller of purple, whose heart the Lord opened like a spring flower, came from there. As for the town itself, it lay in an open valley, with no natural defence of hills, and needing a strong garrison to defend it. Whether Lydia had anything to do with the starting of the Church is a matter of pure conjecture. The aspect of our Lord which is turned towards the Church, therefore, must be regarded in its reference to the Church alone, and not with regard to any historical or political feature of its life. Observe that He is to this Church the Son of God. There is the note of Divine authority. He hath His eyes like a flame of fire, which description is to be

taken with verse 23, "I am He who searcheth the reins and the heart," which is not to say merely that He sees and searches out everything, but that there is something terrible in His aspect and His revealing vision of that which is wrong.

His feet are like unto burnished brass is an indication of strength and firmness, and these in action. *Holiness*, *omniscience*, *power*, attributes or characteristics calculated to inspire with awe those who discerned them. And these—let it never be forgotten—are permanent characteristics of Christ. Say all that you can about His gentleness, His humanity, His compassionate mercy—and no one can say too much, and no one saw these more clearly than the human author of these letters—but we have studied these letters and the whole book so far to very little purpose if we have not seen the Kingly Christ glorious in majesty and power, and unyielding in His demands for purity; with a regal authority of holiness which is never to be trifled with, and which has its side which is truly terrible towards the wrongdoer. There are people whose conception of Christ would be that He sees all, but is so soft with pity that He passes by wrong with a gentle reproof and remonstrance. They have made to themselves an image of Christ with its feet of crumbling clay when the execution of judgment was in question. It is not the figure of the New Testament. His eyes can not only search all: they can blaze with indignation, not merely at the wrong of the world, but, first of all, as this letter proves, against evils that are tolerated in the

Church and in the hearts of Christian people. But before we come to that—

1. *Note that He sees all that is good in the Church, and sees it first.* Precisely what we saw in the case of the Church in Ephesus we see here. There are works in the Church which are altogether pleasing to Christ, and works that would satisfy most of us; and then there is that which spoils everything. Everything in these letters forbids our taking a one-sided view of our Christian life, which we are continually prone to do. You must not only cite those things that you *have*, you must remember the things which you have *not*. The gaps and omissions in the lives of many of us are enough to condemn us in the sight of our Lord, and we must take into account the things of the opposite sort which are continually dividing and distracting and weakening the supreme purpose of life, and reducing our efforts to perfect impotency. What, for example, could be more delightful than verse 19 taken by itself. Read it carefully; it is one of the most charming pictures in the whole of this series of pictures. There are works as there were at Ephesus. But there is *love* behind the works, which there was not at Ephesus—the grace which God delights in, which our Lord and His apostles insist on. It was there in Thyatira, and *faith* was there. If you like, fidelity, which is always an essential part of faith, faith in God and in men and faithfulness towards both, the trust and love which make a happy Church and a happy Christian life.

Then there is ministry or *service*, a word from which our "DEACON" comes, and which stands for service of each other in lowly and helpful ways, each seeking not his own but the other's good, the ministry to the poor and sick which indicates genuine kindness of disposition.

Once more, there is *patience*, the power to endure and to continue, the quality of steadfastness which holds on, in spite of provocation or difficulty; holds on in faith and love and service through the dark night and the stormy day.

And, finally, you have an augmenting Church—the very opposite of Ephesus in this regard. No decline here, no dropping off in weariness, but an increasing vigour and activity and usefulness. Now if we could only cut this letter in two, what a satisfying and charming picture we should have. But you observe that Christ does not stop there, because that is not the whole, and you must have the whole. "*All* things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." And the whole point of this letter is that you may have all these excellencies in a Church or a character, and then have that which sullies, and if it be not amended will ruin them all.

2. So to this Church Christ says "BUT I have against thee," and then follows a passage which amazes you by its revelations. These very people about whom all these delightful things have been said are being led into sins from which we recoil with loathing, and they are tolerating within the borders of the Church the person

whose teaching is leading to the sin. And their toleration of the evil is the point of the Lord's rebuke "*Thou* SUFFEREST *the woman Jezebel.*" It would be very interesting to pursue the inquiry as to who precisely "*Jezebel*" is. To begin with we may assume that it is a name borrowed from the Old Testament and given to describe the influence which was being wielded in the Church in Thyatira. We all know what Jezebel of the Old Testament was: that she influenced her husband to do many wicked things, but chiefly that she came into Israel from Tyre, and brought her religion with her, and succeeded in setting up the worship of Baal side by side with that of Jehovah. She had no objection to Jehovah, but only to the monopoly, the exclusive claim set up on the part of Jehovah by His servants the prophets, and Jezebel is one that *calleth herself a prophetess, and teacheth.* There appears to be no reason why we should not think of a *woman* in the Church at Thyatira (it throws indirect light on early Church history) who professed to have revelations from God—a woman of strong character—who was allowed to be one of its teachers, and whose strong influence was drawing the members of the Church to take part in the feasts which were a prominent feature of the life of Thyatira. Trade guilds, political clubs and similar societies would begin their gatherings with an act of idolatrous worship, and end in a feast with wine and dancing and revelry of a licentious and immoral character. According to verse 21 there had been some dealing of Christ with this person,

some pleading and remonstrance, and much longsuffering, and she had become hardened in her determination to pursue her own course, and had refused to repent. The awful judgments of verses 22 and 23 are pronounced not on the Church but on this person, and those who associated with her in her sin and her bold disregard of the pure law of Christ. The point, however, to which I return in our text is that grave fault of the Church "Thou *sufferest* the woman Jezebel." Note the exact word, not co-operation but *toleration*, a false toleration from a Christian point of view. No word is more capable of being misused than the word *toleration*. There is a toleration that is a *sin* as truly as there is a bigotry which is a sin in the sight of God, and there is a holy intolerance.

Let me say about this unholy *toleration* in Thyatira that it is apparently a defect of the quality of the Church. Compare for a moment the case of the Church in Ephesus. "Thou canst not bear evil men. Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans," but "thou didst leave thy *love*." There was the defect of the Church's quality. The quality was a rigid determination to have no evil within its borders, and everything hardened into that, and all tenderness was lost.

Now here is a Church that has the love and the tender ministry and lacks the balancing quality which makes love perfect—of intolerance towards evil. Is it not one of the weaknesses of to-day? We deplore the bigotry and narrow exclusiveness of a former time.

Let us remember that there is an exclusiveness which must belong to the Church of Christ, an exclusiveness which declares that it will have no compliance with that which is opposed to the pure and perfect law of Christ, and which strikes at His supreme authority in the soul and in the Church, and let us determine—would God that we would all do it—to exclude from our own lives everything that weakens or slackens the regal nature of His claims.

You see the situation in Thyatira. The Church was capable of great and beautiful things, and then was allowing to operate within its own borders an influence entirely destructive of the good things, and which would soon make them impossible, influences incompatible and antagonistic. It was not a matter of teaching only, it was a matter of daily practice. What a lesson there is here for the Church and the Christian of to-day. For your fashionable mood of to-day is tolerance, good-natured tolerance. And it is very easy to admit that into a Church, in your very desire to be comprehensive, which will spoil your finest work, and make it impossible. And you may allow that in a Christian home, through sheer good nature, which will drive out the spirit of devotion and seriousness. And you may allow that in a Christian life which simply nullifies and makes void all your best spirit and endeavours. It may be nothing like the gross evils into which some of the Thyatiran Christians were being led. It may be nothing worse than levity, and yet it

may drive away effectually every serious and sacred thought.

It is to be feared that there is a process of building up and pulling down going on continually in some lives. People are submitting themselves to two sets of influences which are mutually destructive. They go to church on Sunday and are subdued and softened. They go next day to the theatre with its questionable play, or the midnight dance with its immodest dress, and the good that has been gathered, and the very taste for prayer, is simply destroyed. Nor is it in amusements alone. It may be in sensational and unwholesome literature. It may be in business practices which bring the excitement of gain, but which will not stand the test of the teaching of Christ, and which pervert and injure the soul that allows them, and which sweep out of it that sweet seriousness of holy desire, that tender compassion for the poor and sorrowful which should ever be in the Christian heart. There is some amount of discussion on the meaning of *the deep things of Satan* of verse 24. It probably refers there to Gnosticism, an unwholesome desire to pry into the secrets of the origin of life, and an indulgence in unwholesome pleasures. But it occurs to me that one of the deep things of Satan is, not to set us directly against religious observances, but to persuade us to set up in our lives, or to allow there, that which will simply make ineffective the religious act. I take for example the season of Christmas, and the close of the year. No season is more conducive to serious

thought on the trend and quality of life, and we seek that thought many of us, and are much impressed—and then we give ourselves to excitements, the indulgence of mirth and jollity, so that every serious consideration is swept out of our breast. It is so easy for us to attempt to keep contraries and opposites in our nature, and to foster one thing which destroys the other.

3. I cannot deal with the judgment of the Lord on *Jezebel,* saving to say that it is to be of an awful character, of a like nature with her sin, and is to fall on all who have become her victims, and have suffered themselves to be led astray. There is a faithful remnant in Thyatira, and the Lord, who searcheth the hearts and reins and giveth to each according to his works, sees and singles them out, and upon them He casts none other burden than that which they have—which probably is that they keep the old apostolic decree to abstain from things offered to idols and from fornication, along with their love and faith and ministering; that is, that they keep themselves pure in body and in soul, pure and separate from contamination with an unclean world in spite of the reproach of narrowness and bigotry which may be cast upon them—and they are to hold fast until the Lord come. Then the mystery will be cleared, and the reproaches of men will melt away for ever in the approval and blessing of the Son of God.

Let me say a final word on the benediction pronounced on him that overcometh; for one thing, it

precedes for the first time in the letters the words "*He that hath an ear*," etc., and this order is preserved in all the letters that remain. For another thing, something is added to the overcoming, namely, the keeping of the works of Christ, probably in opposition to the works of Jezebel, which are to be repented of (verse 22). Overcoming includes the seductions within the Church and the reproach which comes through keeping the works of Jesus—the temptations which come from the avowedly bad and from the apparently good. To those who overcome such temptations two things are promised. First, authority, of which the Roman Empire was a type to some, but more surely the eternal power of the Lord Jesus. Second, the "morning star," the new light which should break upon the world with the coming Kingdom of Christ. For both passages refer to the Son of God. The whole passage declares, "He that keepeth My works to the end shall share My glory." The promise is identical with that to the Laodicean Church. "He that overcometh shall sit with Me in My throne." And the promise is the more significant, placed alongside the solemn warning of the letter.

The people who partake of the works of Jezebel will share the judgments which fall on Jezebel. Being within the Church will neither save her nor them. They who keep the works of Christ, excluding from their lives the works which destroy these, will be partakers of His glory. "I will give unto each of you according to your WORKS."

Let us watch and pray that the works of our lives may be Christ's works, that there may be given to all of us a holy intolerance of all that is opposed thereto, and that we may be kept pure and loyal to Him until the end, that so we may help to bring in His glorious and everlasting kingdom.

THE LETTER TO SARDIS

Rev. iii. 1—6

The letter to Sardis is so full of matter for consideration that it will be extremely difficult to compress it into the space available for us. It is in some respects the most striking in the series. To begin with, *the description of Christ is most remarkable.* Generally in these superscriptions, He is represented as being clothed with wholly Divine attributes ; here there is a blending of the Divine and the human—"*the seven spirits of God*" indicate the perfection of the Spirit's presence and operation. On the other hand the seven stars (chapter i. 20) are the angels of the seven Churches meaning probably the sum total of the life of the Churches, their peculiar characteristics, or, as you would say, their genius or spirit. Each letter is addressed to the angel of the Church. Both these are in the possession of Christ, the angels of the Churches with their frailty and imperfections, and then the Divine power in its perfection. He mediates the one to the other, which is the same thing as saying that those who really believe on Him receive the power and fulness of the Spirit both in His cleansing and sanctifying influence.

We pass on to the description of the Church in Sardis,

and we may remember that Sardis, like Pergamum, had been a royal city ; that it was the capital of the ancient Lydian Kingdom ; that here Crœsus the rich ruled ; that it stood on what was apparently a solid rock, on three of its sides sheer perpendicular—a natural stronghold therefore—a fact which needs to be borne in mind in the consideration of the latter part of this letter.

For the Church here, as a Church, Christ has no word of praise or commendation. It is severely condemned. There is nothing said about the toleration of the Nicolaitan or any other heresy. In three awful words —two in the original—its description is given. "*Thou art dead.*" When you have said that you can say nothing more. A *dead* Church, you would say, is a Church which has ceased to operate. But I suppose a thing, or at any rate a society, which has ceased to live may exist. A thing, or a creation even, that is dead has not of necessity disappeared ; its form may remain, and there may be a semblance of life in death, even as there may be a semblance of death in life. There are certain conditions in which it requires an expert to say whether a creature or a person is living or dead. And the Church in Sardis seemed to be alive, and there was a point of life in it—a faithful few who had not defiled their garments, of whom we shall come to speak later. Indeed, the verdict of Christ on the Church would have surprised everybody who only knew the Church from the outside. "*Thou hast a name that thou livest.*" That was the bitter irony of the situation, the Church had

"*works*" and it had a reputation. It was what some people would call a "live" Church. I must allow myself the liberty, under the term "Thou hast a name that thou livest," to imagine that there was plenty "*going on*" in the Church, that its congregations were crowded, that its buildings were appropriate, that its offertory was large, that its ritual was pleasing, and that if there had been daily newspapers in that day in Asia Minor with editors hungering for copy, there would have been many a paragraph in them describing the doings of the Church in Sardis and the utterances of its minister, and "Sunday Mornings in Asia" would have included a glowing column on Sardis.

Influential people in the well-to-do city were in the membership of the Church, and they would see to it that as far as the externals of the Church were concerned nothing should be lacking. You are forced to the conclusion, as you read the message of Christ to Sardis, that the real condition of a Church may be the exact opposite of its reputation; that a Church may live for the purpose of making an outside reputation; that a minister may strive to do that which will strike the imagination of the looker-on rather than that which will approve itself unto God; that a Church may appear from the outside to be flourishing, and within may be hollow and dead like a tree that will keep its green long after it has lost its heart. One of the things to be guarded against by a Church in these days of religious newspapers is that of living and working for an outside

reputation. One of the things to be sedulously cultivated is the habit of submitting everything that belongs to a Church's life to the searching judgment of Christ. You are forced to the conclusion that much in a Church, which may seem to men to be *life*, seems to Christ to be *death*. And it would not surprise me to be told that the Churches in London which figure most largely in the newspapers are precisely *not* the Churches in which the greatest volume of spiritual energy is to be found. For spiritual energy is an incalculable quantity which rather escapes the measurement of the journalist.

"I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God," is the further complaint of Christ respecting this Church, and I call your attention to the serious nature of this statement. "I have found," gives an irresistible notion of the works having been closely scanned by Christ, and that every one of them has been found defective on inspection. "Weighed in the balances and found wanting" might have been written on all the numerous activities of the Church in Sardis. The closing words of the sentence are also profoundly impressive. "*Before my God*, I have found no works of thine fulfilled," that is, judged by God's standard there was a fatal defect about them, and the conclusion is they had not been done as unto Him and under His eye. In the sight of men the works had been done, and by the standard of men they would have been passed, but they had not been fulfilled "before my God."

The impression which remains on my mind, after

reading this charge and complaint, is the solemnising impression of One who looks carefully into the works of a Church and the works of our individual Christian lives, and that therefore it would be the part of wisdom for *us* to look into them. We cannot afford to go on from one year to another without looking into our works and our ways. There is no commercial concern in this world that prospers that is not in all its departments carefully examined periodically. Nothing that prospers is allowed to drift dreamily on. And we are not wise to allow a Church to go on, or a life named by the name of Christ to go on, without periodical and thorough and searching examination. How much of the work of your life will bear rigid scrutiny? How much of your doings is worthless, a mere waste of time and room and energy, with no real profit in it for yourself or others? How many of us are turning our schooltime here into play-time, and trifling away splendid opportunities for learning of God and serving men?

The questions will force themselves upon one's mind as questions to be asked of each man's heart to-day in the light of this letter. Are my works, any or all of them, *fulfilled* before my God? My Sunday school teaching, preaching, visiting, my work in school and office—is it done as in His sight and as unto Him? And is it fulfilled—done with redundant thoroughness, rounded out to completeness? And a question which lies behind that is, Am I really living the life, or have I only the name? It is quite possible that in every other

respect the people composing the Church in Sardis were alive—alert at business; excited in pleasure. On the spiritual side they were dead—no response to spiritual appeals. And that is precisely where many Church members are to-day, and it is well for each of us to ask, *Is it I?* Established in Church connection, but having no vital union with Christ. Observing certain forms, but strangers to the reality which should underlie them. Moved and excited greatly where money or purely physical comfort or pleasure are in question, unmoved save to a certain measure of impatience by purely spiritual interests, and incredulous altogether on the subject of spiritual joys. "Thou hast a name that thou livest." Church member, communicant, believer, Christian. The name is all. You have no interest in Christ's kingdom, are doing no hand's turn for its extension, making no sacrifice, simply living to please yourself. So was the Church in Sardis. So it may be with some of us.

2. Observe that there is even hope for such a condition as this. There is the most severe reprimand imaginable, a most deplorable condition described; but in the valley of Achor there is a door of hope, a way from the death into which they have drifted, back into life again. Our Lord wounds only that He may heal. Here is the first step indicated, "Be thou watchful," which may with equal truth be rendered "Wake-up," become wide-awake, spiritually. Be spiritually what you are commercially, alert men to see and seize every

possible advantage. A great deal is said by our Lord and His apostles on this matter. One of the words which came often to his lips was "*Watch.*" "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." Watch and pray, live the vigilant life. And it was one of Paul's favourite counsels, "Let us not sleep as do others; it is high time to awake; awake thou that sleepest and rise from the dead." The whole line of counsel indicates a fatal possibility of dreamily drifting, of becoming the subjects of a spiritual paralysis which steals over the faculties of the soul; of losing the consciousness of God, and of the real entity of the spiritual life. There are a thousand things about us every day to induce spiritual slumber; we have yielded to it, and we must arouse ourselves and shake it off, and resist its insidious approach.

"*Strengthen the things that remain*" is the next step. It is difficult to see what remained unless it were the forms. Everything else seems to have gone, and the suggestion that they are to be strengthened is highly significant. Suppose only a form of prayer is left, that when you kneel at night or bow in church, it is little or nothing more than a formality, what then? Drop the form, some would say. This counsel is the opposite—do not drop the form, but strengthen it by seeking to get back the spirit and power; the stubborn persistence in the forms may help to bring back the spirit. Keep on at your family worship, your private prayer, your Christian work, not in the same way, but with more

ardour than ever. To break the form may be to lose the last shred and fibre of life.

The next step is "*Remember*," the same counsel that was given to the Ephesian Church. Only here the memory is to exercise itself with what had been received. What was it? *Forgiveness:* the blotting out and remission of the guilt of sin. "He hath forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins," says Peter of a certain kind of person, and with it hath forgotten the price at which he was redeemed from eternal death. That, however, is only a part; there would follow knowledge of Christ, joy in the Holy Ghost, Divine forbearance and grace, great and wonderful opportunities of service, and much more.

"*And how thou didst hear.*" Do you note the suggestion, at least, that these things lay in the past? That the Church had left off to receive and to hear as it used? It had become much engaged in making a reputation, and in many forms of useless activity, but it had ceased to sit at the feet of Christ, to hear His word, to receive of His fulness. Its ears were dull with spiritual slumber, and in its activity it had become a law to itself, and had lost the habit of consulting His will. And the whole counsel is summed up in the last word of it, "*Repent.*" Stop the drift, change the current of your living. There is the possibility for every man who knows that his life has gone wrong. A hard possibility often, involving an agony of struggle, but a possibility even for what is described as a dead Church.

3. For you will mark in the third place that there is a bright spot in Sardis. A corner of real life in the great envelope of apparent death. Jewels among the dust. And He who saw the death saw the life also, and marked the faithful few and made them immortal. It is worth our while to observe that one can be faithful among the faithless. You live in a hard place, my dear young brother, where it is a desperate business to keep a clean heart and clean lips. You do not live in so bad a place as Sardis, and He who kept the remnant there undefiled can keep you; and I pray that He will keep you true, and keep you bold and unashamed. *They have not defiled their garments.* That is a hint of the cause of sleep and death in Sardis. It was a city notorious for its licentiousness, its fleshly indulgence of various kinds. There is nothing so surely conducive to spiritual slumber as bodily indulgence, not of the gross and revolting kind merely, but of the more refined. And there were a few who had been kept pure. It can be done, there is power sufficient. It *is* being done. Nothing lifts up my heart more than to know that in school and office, and in foul surroundings, there are those who keep a pure heart.

And these people had not left the Church. They might have done. If they had been of the "stand aside, for I am holier than thou" temper they would have done. They would have formed a little community of their own and shaken the dust off their feet against the offending Church. The probability is that they were

quite unconscious of their spiritual superiority to their brethren; for real spiritual superiority is ever unconscious of itself, dwelling as it does so near to the eternal purity of Christ. And it is at least possible that if we could have found these people we should have discovered that they had far less notion of their own perfection than the majority in the Church had of theirs.

4. I come in the last place to the consideration of the future, certain on the one hand, possible on the other, as it is sketched for these people. For the faithful few there is the certainty. Their future will be an expansion of the present. "They have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with Me in white." Christ with them now, and therefore they are kept. They with Him hereafter, their purity eternally assured in the city into which nothing that defileth can enter. The hunger for goodness perfectly satisfied. Like Him with whom they walk.

The significant thing is that the same blessed possibility is held out to every member of the Church in Sardis. "*He that overcometh.*" It will be a fearful warfare, but it can be accomplished. The dry bones can be made to live and can stand on their feet an exceeding great army. He that overcometh—whoever he may be—shall thus be arrayed in white raiment and his name shall be heralded in the presence of the high court of heaven.

But there is another side which must not and cannot be overlooked. Suppose the counsel of Christ be not

laid to heart nor acted upon by this Church! Suppose that to this message, as to so many others, it turns a deaf and dead ear! Suppose it fail to watch and remember and repent! What will happen? Take two passages in the letter. "I will come on thee as a thief, etc."—what does that mean? The city of Sardis stood on what appeared to be an inaccessible rock. Save at one point where an isthmus of land connected it with the valley it seemed impregnable. And that point was guarded; there soldiers kept their watch while the city slept. But twice in the history of Sardis, in the dead of night, at the spot where men slept in fancied safety, an enemy had climbed up the face of the rock where there was a fault in it and it had been lost. So in some mode of judgment Christ declares that He will come to the unrepentant and dead Church. The thing that is dead cannot remain to pollute the atmosphere.

The second expression is, "I will not blot out his name," etc. What is the obverse side of that? Surely this, that a man's name may be blotted out of the book of life as the name of a criminal is deleted from the burgesses list of a city. There is nothing more startling and appalling than the possibility declared in Scripture that a man may lose his standing in Christ. How is it done? By yielding to sin. By indulging the body and neglecting the soul. My New Testament is an unmeaning book to me if it does not teach that I who preach to others may become a castaway. An unspeakable awe gathers over my heart as I read the quiet words

of Christ, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away," and as the picture rises to mind of Him, who died to redeem, blotting from the book of life the name that He wrote there because the man has drifted down to spiritual death. There are two possible goals: walking in white; blotted out of the book of life. Which shall be ours?

THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

Rev. iii. 7—13

The city of Philadelphia was a city founded by the old Pergamene kingdom. It derived its name from Attalus the Second, who earned the title Philadelphus by his loyalty and devotion to his brother Eumenes. A memorial of brotherly love and fidelity was this city, and the Church within it was conspicuous for its fidelity. There is no heresy in it. Nothing is said of the Nicolaitans or of those who hold the doctrine of Balaam. It was not a great and prosperous Church like Ephesus, nor had it a great reputation like Sardis.

"*Thou hast little power*" is the comment on its condition. But it had been faithful: "Thou didst keep My word and didst not deny My name." It is one of two Churches concerning which there is no word of blame or reprimand from the lips of the risen Christ. And there is far more of positive and emphatic approval than in the case of Smyrna, the other Church which is not blamed. Unmixed, unreserved commendation is the characteristic of this letter; altogether refreshing is the reading thereof. "*I have loved thee*" is the frank confession of the Lord to this Church. The description of

Christ is not, as in some of the letters, a contrast to the condition of the Church, but is in accord with it, a faithful Lord to a faithful Church, a holy Lord to a pure Church. The only point of contrast seems to be between the weakness of the Church and the power of Christ. "Thou hast little strength." I am "He that hath the key of David (symbol of authority), that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and none shall open," and the weak Church is allied with the strong Christ in the terms "I have loved thee."

1. It is very interesting to trace the points of similarity between the Church here and the Church in Smyrna. Not only are both free from blame, a joy to the Lord—a Church may be either a joy or a pain to Him—but both are weak, with no outside reputation. That is significant. The letter to Sardis taught us that a Church that has the greatest reputation outside may be most dead in the sight of Christ. And a Church that has no reputation, no wealth, no imposing array of figures, may be the Church which is altogether satisfactory in the sight of Christ. The last things to boast of for a Church, the last things to rest in and be satisfied with, are wealth and numbers. The first things to seek and to rejoice in are holiness, spiritual life and vigour, fidelity in all things to the person and work and word of Christ. "Thou didst keep My word, thou hast not denied My name," is high commendation to come from the lips of Christ. It is not a little significant that the Churches that are poor and weak are the Churches that

are faithful, and in which Christ finds His greatest joy. And the fact forces one to make the inquiry, Is it possible that, with Churches as with individuals, prosperity is apt to steal the heart away from Christ? that abundance breeds spiritual carelessness and laxity? Is it possible that our Lord looks down to-day with more complacency and joy on a little company of simple people, labouring men and farmers, shopkeepers gathered in some unadorned conventicle on the country hillside, strangers to worldly pleasures and excitements, than on some crowded well-dressed congregation meeting in its well-appointed sanctuary, proud of its building, its music, its ministry, its social position, its wealthy members, its work, itself? No one can say that it is so, but at least it may be. It may be that there is nothing but the realised presence of Christ, and here is everything but that, and we know which is the one thing needful.

The next point of similarity between these two Churches is in their trial. They are both troubled by the Jews. It is not alone the Pagan community that harries them, but those who call themselves God's chosen people. It seems a strange thing, but it is true that there have been no more bitter persecutors in Christian history than the Jews—pioneers in the terrible pathway they were—and none who in their turn have been more bitterly persecuted. We know how they pursued Paul with fiercest hatred, and both in Smyrna and Philadelphia they had been apparently the chief foes of the Church.

And there is a most significant note relating to them and to the Christians in this letter—a most solemn and instructive note. To begin with, they are called the synagogue of Satan. The synagogue is literally the assembly, the congregation; they met professedly to worship the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And it would appear from the phrasing of this letter that a congregation meeting to worship God may be captured by Satan and made the agent and instrument of his designs. If that be true of a congregation met to worship God, it may be equally true of a congregation met to worship Christ. Perhaps people are nowhere more off their guard than in church, and nowhere more disposed to easy assurance; and there a spirit that is worldly and sensual and devilish may spring up and prevail.

Then there must be observed the forfeiture of privilege by the Jews and the bold transference of all that to the Christian Church. There seems to be something stern almost to fierceness in the words, "They say they are Jews and are not, but do lie," which seems to say, you are no longer a Jew when you forfeit the spirit of the Jew. And you are no longer a Christian when you abandon the Christian attitude. It is the spirit that makes the Jew. And it is the spirit that makes the Christian. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God," and "if any man have not the *Spirit* of Christ, he is none of His." He may call himself what he will.

"I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee," is a mixed quotation from the ancient prophecy concerning Israel, and is one of many proofs in the New Testament that the great prophecies which Israel forfeited may be claimed and realised by Christian people. Once again the message of warning stands out in letters of light There is no position that cannot be forfeited. The promise which God makes to His elect people, Jew or Christian, can only be realised as the conditions are fulfilled. Be unfaithful and the fulfilment will pass from you to another. You are safe in neither synagogue nor church, but as you guard your soul and keep humbly and rigidly in the pathway of obedience. All that is possible to you in Moses or in Christ may be forfeited by unfaithfulness and disobedience. Let these lessons be written on our hearts.

2. There are points of instruction next from the natural history of Philadelphia. There is an hour of trial to come upon men, in the midst of which this Church will be guarded. According to Ramsay, Philadelphia lay in a volcanic region, and there were periodical disturbances which imperilled life and property. During one of these waves of convulsion houses would be wrecked, treasure would be lost, and life would be destroyed. Often when such a trial was expected there would be a great exodus from the city itself, and people who had fled in nervous panic would live outside the city in huts and booths until the shocks

of earthquake were past. It is this that is probably referred to both in the "*hour of trial*" and "*the pillar of the temple to be removed no more*," of which we read in the gracious promises of this letter. As though a man and his possessions were kept in steadfast security unharmed in an earthquake, so in the trials which are to break on the other Churches this is to be kept secure. "In the hour of trial I will keep thee."

It were well just at this point to trace the fulfilment of this prophecy in the after history of the city. I am not able to say how this Church fared in the great persecution, but it is interesting to remember that in the last great struggles of the Turk for the supremacy in Asia Minor this city was the very last to surrender. "Its inhabitants rose to such a lofty pitch of heroism, and displayed such qualities of steadfastness and endurance, that even Gibbon is roused to admiration."[1] For a century at least it stood alone, a Christian city, a free, self-governing city, as though protected by an unseen power against the Turkish might that ruled all the surrounding land.

There are two other points in the natural history of Philadelphia to which reference is made in the letter—(1) *The open door.* The allusion is doubtless to the natural situation of the city. It was, as you would say, the key to a large district lying north and east of it, which it commanded; and in the days of its political predominance it was expected to play the part of a

[1] Ramsay.

missionary city in spreading the Greek language and Roman customs among the Asiatic towns. Now by its very situation the Church had before it an open door, a great opportunity of which no man could deprive it, to spread the Gospel in the district commanded by the city. This opportunity and the power to embrace it was probably the crown which it was to hold fast, and which no man was to be allowed to snatch. The other point from its history is connected with the promise of the new name (verse 12). After the earthquake, A.D. 17, the city, out of gratitude to Rome, built a temple to the Emperor, and took his name, and was actually called the *New Cæsarea*. And the promise is that if the Church be faithful, if it enter, as I take it, into the open door, if it still hold fast, then it shall have an experience differing from the city in many respects and analogous in a glorified manner in others. In a time of peril it shall be kept in safety, its needs shall be supplied, stability and permanence shall be granted to it, and a new name shall be won. So far from being oppressed and trodden under by the Jews, it shall be reverenced. For weakness there shall come power, and for defeat victory, while it shall be obvious to all that upon this Church the loving favour and honour of God abides.

3. The question remains: What lessons are there in this ancient message to an Oriental Church for a Church existing in this Western land at the commencement of the twentieth century?

There are two things that stand out conspicuously from the letter. The first is *the open door;* that, our Lord seems to say, is the reward of fidelity. The Church has kept the word of Christ, and has not denied His name. The reward for that is a door set open by Christ; an opportunity for service, and more than an opportunity, an invitation indicating a Divine intention. The personal pronouns are to be emphasised. *I* have set before *thee* a door opened. A definite work lying before the Church which it alone can do.

It is the way God rewards fidelity, not with rest and ease, but with greater service. A great claim made on a Church, a great demand, indicates the Divine favour and pleasure. There could be few sadder things predicated of a Church than that God had no other door open for it. No fresh work, no new sacrifice, no more land to be possessed.

One might speak generally of doors that are open to the Church, set open by God's providence. The door into heathen lands, with still the old watchword ringing in our ears: Go ye and make disciples of all the nations. The door of influence in the government of the affairs of this nation. If we would have the wrongs redressed of which we complain; if we would do something to defend and deliver our beloved land from the dominion of the papacy which is slowly but surely winning its way amongst us; if we would aim a blow at the drink traffic; if we would preserve to our children inviolate the freedom of faith and conscience which is ours; if

we would bring nearer that religious equality which is our right, as Christian men we should eagerly seize and conscientiously use the opportunities offered to us in our rights of citizenship.

For individuals among us doors are being opened by God : in business, in our home life, in Christian work, in personal character. There are reforms to be wrought; things that are at loose ends, chaotic conditions to be reduced to order, doors to reconciliation, to holier living, to a more diligent cultivation of our spiritual life. For myself I would regard every call to a higher and more strenuous endeavour as a proof and token of Divine favour, and would pray for eyes to see the door and for strength and wisdom to press into it. For strength is needed. There is something to overcome, even in this Church in Philadelphia—obstacles to be surmounted, obstructions lying in the path.

"A great and effectual door is opened unto me" wrote Paul, "and there are many adversaries." And we may be sure that where there is an open door there will be difficulties, always something to overcome. But no difficulty and no adversary can prevent the earnest and trustful heart from entering the doors which God sets open.

Because the promises are sure, because doors that are not attempted have a way of automatically closing, and opportunities that are abused are withdrawn, let us pray for grace to enter manfully, fearlessly, trustfully every door that God sets before us, avoiding doors of self-

pleasing worldly allurement, entering God's doors that we may live to His glory, and may have written upon our service and ourselves His own name of ownership and habitation, and may be a people among whom He dwells and on whom His name is called.

THE LETTER TO LAODICEA

Rev. iii. 14—22

GRANTED that these are the words of Christ, the risen, living, all-seeing Christ, and not the mere fruit of any human brain, they are among the most solemn and searching words in human language. Of all the letters to the seven Churches this is the saddest. It is also in some respects the most surprising, both in its severity and its tender beauty.

Speaking generally, we observe that there is no word of commendation in it. That is true of the letter to Sardis so far as the Church is concerned. But in Sardis there are individuals who stand out to claim the "well done" of Christ. The gloom of death which hangs over the Church is relieved by points of light and examples of life. There are fair flowers on the dust-heap in Sardis. In Laodicea there is no redeeming feature, not a streak of light relieves the gloom, the condemnation is unqualified.

See with what authoritative terms this letter is prefaced. He who sends it is the *Amen*, the Verity, who says what will be, whose word no man disannuls or alters. He is "the *faithful and true witness*," who says nothing which He does not know and mean, nothing to

raise false hopes, or false fears. He is also *the beginning of the creation of God;* not the first of God's works, but the spring and fountain of His creation; without whom "was not anything made that was made." It is impossible to believe that any man who could write the latter part of this letter—least of all the Apostle John—could write so august a prelude as this to any composition of his own. That were blasphemy of which he or any other man were incapable. I stand in the presence of the King and Lord of the Church, and take this declaration with due reverence from His hand. I look at the Church in Laodicea, that rich and busy city, in the light of His knowledge, and ask what lessons His message has for us in these days. I remember His terrible rebuke of the Church, and seek the cause.

1. And first I observe that there is an absence of gross evil in the Church. There is no Nicolaitan heresy, no woman Jezebel with her vitiating and ruinous influence, no scandalous immorality, no glaring departure from the truth. A Church in which if you were looking for obvious and positive blots you would find none. But on the other hand, no positive good, no zeal, no enthusiasm. Colourless, passionless, insipid, was its life. "Thou art neither cold nor hot," neither one thing nor the other, a Church whose Christian character must be painted in neutral and negative tints.

I have been unable to resist the impression, as I have pondered over this description, that it covers accurately a considerable amount of the life which is in and around

our Churches at the present day. We have escaped from the coarse and gross vices which too often disfigured the fair fame of our Churches in a past generation, when it was common, as many old Church books will testify, to expel people every year for drunkenness and immorality. We have escaped also in large measure from the bigotry and intolerance of that time. But we have lost also that zeal for the Kingdom, the spiritual passion, the specific Christian fervour of an unworldly sort which characterised the saints of a past day, and there is danger of our losing entirely the separate spirit, the aggressive spirit; danger of our forgetting that the Church of Christ is missionary and propagandist in character. We are interested in spiritual exercises and enterprises, barely interested in some of them, but still interested. We like very well to go where they are spoken of. But they are not matters of *supreme* interest to us. The things that stir our pulses and awake our ardour, that we most of all delight in, are not these, but other. We would not have our children grow up irreligious—that were a reproach to us; but neither would we have them whole-heartedly and enthusiastically Christian—caring nothing for the pleasures of the world, passionate in evangelistic zeal, on fire with love for holy things. We would not have them cold, sceptical, unbelieving, godless; but we would not have them hot. We want them to have the name Christian, but it is not certain that we desire them to live in accordance with that description of Him of whom

it was written, "*The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up.*" It is quite right, doubtless, that there should be such people, and we can admire them—at a distance—but we do not want them too near us. And we have no ambitions in that direction for ourselves. Do you not think that we are fashioning for ourselves to-day a Christianity that simply aims at being mild and offenceless, moral, respectable, and nothing more; a Christianity without a cross in it, without any heart-each for the sins and sorrows of the world, whose highest ambition is to do no harm, that has no service for others in it, and no capacity for sacrifice; a religion that will mildly wish well to the cause of the Redeemer of men, but will never shed a drop of blood, nor suffer the slightest inconvenience for the world's salvation? Are we not losing sight of the great word of the Master, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross"? I do not think that the best friend of the Church of Christ to-day could say that it is hot, on fire with the passion for holiness, and with zeal for the conversion of the world. It would be truer to say of multitudes in the Church that they care very little whether the lost and miserable are saved or not. They have plenty of money for other purposes, but next to nothing for this. This is not the thing that excites them, that moves their heart to its depths and causes the face to light up with interest, but some personal gain or pleasure, some physical or social or political pleasure or gain. I tell you that of all the

dangers to the Church of Christ pointed out in these seven letters, *the Laodicean danger is for us the most real and imminent*, the most to be watched against and dreaded. It is the danger of the barren fig-tree, the fruitless branch, and the useless life.

2. Observe, secondly, that along with this condition goes self-complacency and satisfaction. It is noteworthy that the two Churches which are most condemned are the Churches which are the most content. Sardis had a name that it lived, and you may be sure that it had propagated the name itself and pointed to it with pride. And Laodicea said, "I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing."

Doubtless this language refers in great part to the outward prosperity of the Christians in Laodicea. They shared the great wealth of the city. In the year 60 it had been practically destroyed by earthquake as Philadelphia had. But its citizens had refused an imperial grant to retrieve its fortunes, and had repaired the ravages out of their own ample resources.

Indeed, the characteristic of the city was its remarkable power to manipulate all things to its own temporal advantage. Ramsay calls it the city of compromise, standing to gain from every party, catching the wind from every point of the compass, and making the best, in an undesirable way, of both worlds. And the Church had caught the spirit of compromise, it had avoided extremes, and was on good terms with everybody, and most of all with itself, for it had prospered outwardly,

and why should not a prosperous Church, like a prosperous man, be proud? Has it not as good a right? And will it not fall into the snare unless it set a double watch upon itself?

It is the harmless, respectable moral man who is often the self-sufficient man. Proud of his honesty, his industry, his respectability, what *does* he want more? And perhaps it is just this smooth and sleek self-complacency in the Church of Laodicea which leads our Lord to say, "I would thou wert *cold* or hot." Better the coldness of the pure outsider than this tepid, useless, self-satisfied temper. There would be something to lay hold of there and to shake a man by, some sense of wrong, or need, or folly. "I would thou wert cold or hot."

He seems to say that there may be more danger in a condition of harmless morality, or of merely nominal Christianity, than in open and avowed neglect or hostility. The prodigal may get before his moral and heartless elder brother. Here is the startling word of our Master, "Verily, I say unto you, publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of Heaven before you."

You will observe further that this condition of self-complacency is at the same time a condition of fatal self-delusion. "Thou knowest not that thou art the wretched one." There could scarcely be a greater contrast than that displayed in verse 17, between what the Church thought of itself and what Christ saw it to be. As you read it you say self-delusion could no further go.

And what an appalling consideration it is that the estimate of Christ is the true estimate, and that of the Church the false! And what a more appalling consideration it is that such an estimate might be true of some of us! And what an urgent and imperative counsel this is to strip ourselves of our robes of self-righteousness and discover our defects and get acquainted with ourselves before it be too late!

3. *Note the attitude of Christ towards this Church.* You will have already observed its severity. There is nothing like it in the whole of the letters. It simply means that the fruitless, tepid, useless, self-complacent temper, with no harm in it, no good in it, named with His name, is intolerable, loathsome. You say the same thing when you declare that you are sick of a certain theory, or practice, or excuse. You regard it with revulsion, and you will have no more of it. And the gentle Christ can say this, the faithful and true witness who raises no false fears in the breast. It is possible for a Christian, for a disciple, not through vice or gross wickedness, but from sheer uselessness and self-satisfaction, to be wholly offensive to Christ.

But you will have observed further that this is not the whole of His attitude. The message is not a final pronouncement of judgment.

The accurate rendering of the phrase indicates an intention rather than a fiat, a warning rather than an irrevocable sentence.

Indeed, I know of nothing more wondrously beautiful

than the description of our Lord in His attitude to the Church at Laodicea, nor do I know of anything more luminously instructive. In verse 19 He bids the Church become what it is not. "Zealous" comes from the same root as "hot," and He throws open the door of opportunity to the Church in that word. But the great word is in the former part of that verse, the word "love." Of that Church, whose spirit He declares He loathes, He says in effect, *I love thee.* It was what the pure-hearted king Arthur said to the fallen queen Guinevere as she grovelled at his feet. "I loathe thee, and I love thee," and it was the ray of hope for the Church at Laodicea, and it is the only hope for us all. I love, and therefore I rebuke and chasten.

Mark further, *He stands at the door.* Ah, how many sermons have been preached from this text, and how many doors have been opened by its moving appeal. It was at once the Church's condemnation and its hope. All the sadness of its lukewarmness lay in the fact that He was outside, had been crowded out by worldly compromise and by material good. All the hope of the Church lay in the fact that He had not gone away.

And why was He there, and why did He send this sharp letter, and why did He lay bare the fatal defects of this Church? Why did He say, "You are supremely wretched"? It was neither for exultancy over its defects, nor for condemnation, but for healing and amendment. There are local touches in the words —the *gold* refers to the vast banking interests in Laodicea

and offers by contrast the treasure of spiritual character; the "white garments," by contrast, to the glossy fabrics woven from the black sheep of the district; and the eyesalve to the famous remedy for ophthalmia made within the city. And the whole passage means the Lord wounds that He may heal, and strips away the tawdry rags of self-satisfaction that He may cover with the robe of His righteousness, always coming that He may give.

And what a significant picture it is. "I stand at the door and knock." You know what He has said, "I have the keys of death and of Hades." "These things saith He that openeth, and no man shutteth." It is this same august Person who says, "Behold, I stand and knock." It not only speaks of the condescension of the Son of God, it speaks also of the responsibility of man. Possessed of all power, there is one door that He will never force open, and that is the door of a human soul. The fastening is on your side, and you can keep Him out if you will; and if He is without it is your doing and not His, it is because you will to have it so.

Note how He seems to turn from the Church to the individual. "*If any man* hear my voice." There may be such a thing as a whole Church repenting at once. It is very unlikely. Generally such things begin with an individual and spread by contagion. The way to get the door of the Church open and its interior life flooded with the glory of Christ's presence, is to open the door of your own heart, which perhaps you have

never fully done. You have much to overcome before this can be done—pride, reluctance, desire for worldly pleasure, strong temptation. The hinges of the door are rusty, you are half afraid of Him who stands without. To put your whole life at His disposal, to let Him arrange things for you, is more than you have courage or faith for. If we only knew it it would be the opening of the door to the purest joy and blessing.

What does He speak of to those who overcome and open the door? *A supper* and *a throne.* A supper: to partake of a common meal means that fellowship with Christ to which we are strangers. He will take what you have to offer, will sit at the table of the pauper, will take what love you have and what purpose and what desire and what strength, and while He sits there in benediction will do with it as He did with the lad's loaves, and multiply your poor graces.

And not only a *supper* but a *throne*, which means that you may go forth from the hour of blessed fellowship so strengthened as to fight and to become more than conqueror through Him who has loved you; that you who admit the Lord to your inmost thought as Saviour and Friend will be exalted to share His complete triumph. These are not mere dazzling theories, they are magnificent possibilities, brought to the door of every Church, of every life, even the Church and life of which Christ is outside. These are the things which the Spirit saith to the Churches; to every tepid, half-hearted, half-willed, half-consecrated Christian; to every

one of us who is a stranger to communion with Christ and to spiritual joys. The supper, the throne, may be ours; the bliss of fellowship with Christ, the sure hope of immortal triumph, may be not a glorious dream but a blessed reality, not a hope of the heart but a fact of the life. May the Lord incline our ears to hear and give us grace to open our hearts to receive what the Spirit saith, and Him whom the Spirit reveals!

THE REDEEMING LAMB

REV. v.

WEARIED and distressed with his surroundings, the things which he saw daily, John had seen a "door open in Heaven"; the vision of the throne and one sitting upon it had come to him. He had witnessed the worship of the mysterious and holy beings that surround the throne. This had come already for the quieting of his heart; God lives and reigns. His throne is established in righteousness and holiness. He hath not withdrawn from the active government of the nations of the earth. It was a wonderful vision, but from the New Testament point of view incomplete. Any Old Testament seer might have had it, and many of them had, and they declared, The Lord God liveth and reigneth, and as Holy Creator and Ruler He is and should be worshipped. And now in this chapter comes the enlarged vision, and it is well to recognise that the New Testament does not contradict the Old. They are complementary. The throne still stands. The cross has not abolished the throne. God is still the Holy Creator. Whatever conception you form of the eternal you must have this as a background. But there is something more. "In the midst of the throne," stand-

ing in front and in the centre of the throne, and in the centre of the half circle of worshipping beings "stood a Lamb." It is one of the great similitudes of Scripture concerning Christ. Its source is the Passover lamb slain, and it is taken up by Isaiah. "He was led as a lamb, etc." It is developed by the Baptist who points to Him as "the Lamb of God." And the figure is frequent in this book. It has persisted as an image in Christian thought and phrase, and is found much in our hymns. It is a figure; one of the manifestations in which our Lord clothes Himself, the better to appeal to the heart and imagination of men. It is quite wonderful how we, who know nothing of animals offered in sacrifice, but only as slaughtered for food, have clung to the image. With many of us it would be difficult to explain the thoughts that are associated with the figure. Innocence, purity, gentleness, are associated with the playful creatures which gambol in our fields. In this book it can be nothing but a figure, a clothing of spiritual facts in significant symbols which would appeal to the people to whom this book was first written. We understand as we look at the figure that the meaning of it is sacrifice. The horns signify might, and the eyes wisdom, and both in their divine perfection are indications of something more than human. It was not a lamb that was sacrificed, led helplessly and unsuspectingly to the slaughter, but a Divine Man who steadfastly set His face towards the cross, a man by whose manifested glory John has been overawed; who had said to

His trembling servant " Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one and I became dead ! " Now He appears to the entranced soul of His servant as a Lamb which had been slain and lived again. What does the vision mean ?

There is more than the throne in its almost blinding glory. And God is more than Creator and righteous ruler. He clothes Himself not only in glory and majesty, but in gentleness. There is more than creating power and righteousness in God. There is love. Our trust is not immediately in the throne. It may signify different things to different people. It may appal and affright us because we have rebelled against it. It may repel us by its severity. There are times when I dare not lift up my eyes to the throne. If the King is to come to me and my distrustful and fearful heart is to come to Him, it must not be in the blazing splendour of divine power and holiness. From that great sight I might pray to be hidden. So He comes in lowly guise, that the bruised reed may not be broken, nor the smoking flax quenched, nor the weakest thing dismayed, but that the despairing may have hope. It is fairly certain that if our Master had come, in the days of His flesh, in great earthly state and splendour, many of the poor and wretched souls who came to Him would have been repelled. It was His very lowliness that drew the low and the miserable and the poor about Him, and that gave them room to grow in His presence.

But the primary significance of the figure before us is

that there is not only power and holiness in God, there is redemption. I say in God, for it is clear that divine homage is paid to the Lamb, that the same worship is offered to Him who is before the throne and to Him who is on it. The homage which martyred men had refused to the Cæsars, they freely and fully bring to Him who is called the Lamb. And the meaning of the figure is—there is atonement, sacrifice, provided by the throne for men, and when you lift up your eyes to the throne in all its whiteness, abashed and afraid, lo! there stands between you and it the Atoner, reminding you of gentleness, of mercy, and of the provision which God has made for the putting away of our defilement, rebellion and sin. And the man who dare not, to begin with, look at the throne may look at the Lamb until he comes to realise that there is no difference, that while he looks at one in trust and grateful love he is looking at the other, for there is no contradiction between the power and the gentleness, the holiness and the love of God; not only is the throne of God established in righteousness it is surely also established in redemptive sacrifice for men.

Not only does the figure suggest that whenever a guilty and troubled man lifts his eyes to the throne of God, he may behold His redeeming grace and mercy in Christ, and be reminded of the work done on his behalf. It signifies also that the work of human redemption, and the means taken to accomplish it, are ever before the mind of God. And that this same theme fills the

mind and lips of the holy beings who surround the throne of God. The Lamb is there, not that we may behold Him merely, but that they may see Him. And that the theme of their song, the new song—they have sung of creating power and of holiness—may be of redeeming love for man.

Perhaps we had better turn for a moment now and ask, What of the man who was beholding all this in the Spirit, what was its application to him? We remember him troubled and downcast and in exile; we remember, in the presence of the throne of Rome, the comfort it must have been to him to know that the eternal throne of the Ruler of the kings of the earth stood fast. But what did this added vision say to him? Surely this—the cross of Christ which he had seen on Calvary was not in vain. It was operating mightily still. It was not by power, but by sacrifice, that Christ would win men. Purchasing them, by the compulsion of love, leading them to call themselves slaves of Christ, as St. Paul always did.

It was this that caused the ecstatic joy of heaven. It was this that caused the outbreak of wondering worship from myriads and myriads of perfect beings; that the holy God had become the Saviour of men in Jesus Christ, that He would save them, and not destroy them, and that He would save them by winning them to Himself in sacrificial love.

2. The vision of the throne which John saw was the great need of his day, and is the great need of our

day. But we need also the complementary vision, if our hearts are to be touched. We need to realise that the holy and eternal God became man, that He took our sins upon Himself, that His mercy bridged the gulf which yawned between our souls and heaven, and that it is in love that He conquers hearts. It is the love and pity of God above all other things that we need to keep in mind. Our lips would scarcely for a moment be silent, certainly our hearts never could, if before our eyes were kept the vision of the Lamb which had been slain.

There is a note in the new song which has sounded in my own mind as I have read this vision. It is the note of assured victory. Certainly there is no note of sadness or despondency. It is firmly confident throughout. And already the fruits of the Cross are seen. The apostle is now beholding things that are to be, and that are already coming to pass. It may have seemed to him in his solitude a few days ago that the throne of Rome was going to subdue and dominate the men of every tribe and tongue. Now it is shown to him that the throne of God and of the Lamb, the throne of holiness and love, is going to rule. One of the arguments for preaching the Gospel everywhere is found in verse 9, "Men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" are to be brought to God. How? "Purchased," as this passage has it, "by the blood of the Lamb." And you know how He purchases, never without the consent of the person purchased. "He

stands at the door and knocks." How? Surely by the lips of His messengers. By men who present His claims to their fellows as well as by the voice of His Spirit. The redeeming Christ subdues the hearts of men.

And there is another note in this song which arrests my attention. "They shall reign on the earth." We talk of Christ coming to reign on the earth, and there are people who are so literal that they believe in a physical and visible reign of Christ on the earth, as though there were to be a second Incarnation. Whatever the opinion on that may be, here, meanwhile, is a most important matter. They reign on the earth, the purchased people, the people yielded up in the whole of their being to the authority of the Lamb which had been slain. They reign. Why? Because Christ reigns through them, and it is my own personal belief that this is how He is coming to reign on the earth—through the lives and influence and service of the purchased people. Here is the revealed intention of God for Christian people. Here is the dignity of our high calling—we are to reign. At the present we are being ruled by pleasure, custom, passion, or fashion. We have no boldness to do what we believe to be the will of God. Why? Because He does not reign in us.

How is the reign of the Saints to come?

Let me express my own personal conviction that it will come by the same method as the reign of Christ. "Grant that we may sit, one on Thy right

hand and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom." "Can ye drink of My cup and be baptised with My baptism?" What does it mean? The way to influence lies through sacrifice. It is the whole-hearted man, divested of every particle of selfish purpose, who influences and wins you. What is the sacrifice? "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies." That first, then this—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself"; sacrifice to serve. "Who loved not their lives to the death." These are the men who reign because Christ reigns in them. The cross of sacrifice is the way to the throne. The self-indulgent man is the man who has no influence at all. He that loveth himself shall have no influence over others.

3. I have said nothing up to this moment about the opening scene of the chapter, of the book or roll held out on the hand of the occupant of the throne, written on both sides. No one can be dogmatic as to its meaning. We can only go on reasonable probabilities. You will remember that the voice which called the apostle away from brooding over the depressing things in the Seven Churches, assured him that he was to see the things which should come to pass hereafter. The probability is that this roll contains the secrets of the future, the outcome and issue of the present.

The book is written as though all were fore-ordained. It is in the hand of God, as all human destinies are, and all who have read this book of Revelation through

know that there is to pass before the mental eye of the apostle—as in a series of dissolving views and sacred hieroglyphics—a representation of the colossal struggle between the world power and the cause of Christ on the earth, between the powers of good and the powers of evil.

There is no one, no created being in heaven or earth, who is either able or worthy to open the sealed book. While the prophet weeps in his distress, one of the elders speaks to him and tells him that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, a name derived from the prophetic and dying speech of Jacob, has overcome to loose the seals and open the book. If this roll contain, as we may believe it does, the purpose and counsel of God concerning mankind, and particularly concerning His Church, there are one or two things to be remembered. The first is the fact that no one of all the heavenly intelligences or of redeemed men can or dare, is able or worthy, to open the sealed book. It seems to require, not merely one who is holy, but one whose holiness has been exposed to temptation and has conquered. "The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath overcome to open the book." He has won a victory, has grappled with evil and overcome it, and there has come in conflict and in victory a fitness, a knowledge and power which could have come in no other way. A man without the failures of man.

And in connection with this you must take verse 9.

"Worthy art Thou to take the book . . . for thou

wast slain." Take the two things together. "He hath overcome, He was slain." The conclusion surely is that it was by His death that He overcame. I may quote in this connection from Heb. ii. 14: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same, that through death He might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is the devil." And the whole passage seems to say that the Lord Jesus by His Incarnation and sacrificial death, revealing the unutterable love of God to man, has unlocked the mystery of the eternal purposes of God for mankind; and the broad issue is that eternal love and righteousness will prevail. Through many a strange and awful conflict the hosts of God must pass; conflict with the powers of evil; and this seer takes his readers through many a weird battle, where strange shapes are seen at deadly strife. But the final result is never in doubt among the heavenly host. The battle between the love of God and the sin of man, between eternal righteousness and evil that is not eternal, can only end in one way—in the triumph of love and goodness. Whatever comes, eternal righteousness and sacrificial love are on the throne, and the future of the saints and of all men is in the hand of Christ, the hand that was pierced for the world's redemption.

THE OPENING OF THE SIXTH SEAL

Rev. vi.

The writer of this book speaks in riddles, in rich and wonderful symbols which only the initiated can fully understand. He does not call a city or nation or person by its proper name. If he had done so in this instance, the vagaries which have been played with this book, and the grotesque interpretations given to it, would have been impossible. But it is a question whether any man dare have written in plain terms what is here written in figure and symbol and cryptogram of the Roman Empire and its ruling heads. The apocalyptic was the only form in which the message of the book could have been sent. In this chapter we have the opening of the seals. What the roll contained we do not know, unless it contained the things foreshadowed here. The apostle is seeing not with his bodily eyes, but with the eyes of his mind and soul, for he is in the Spirit, and these pictures pass before him. Let us take the first four scenes which stand by themselves. There is a great voice which cries "*come*" (R.V.), not, "come and see," not to him, nor to the Christ who is there and is opening the seals of the book, but to the person who

appears in each vision. A rider on a horse in each case, and standing for some particular thing that is happening or is about to happen to the Roman Empire.

What is the meaning of the first rider on his white horse—the sign of victory—going forth conquering and to conquer? It means war, but it would be out of place to think yet of the conquering Christ or of victorious Christianity. The clue to the mystery may be found in the weapon which he carries. The bow was not the weapon of the Roman. It was the weapon of the Parthians, and their chief weapon. Like the Boers in South Africa, they learned the importance of accurate shooting. Bowmen and horsemen, they were peculiarly and sufficiently formidable to be a scourge to the empire of Rome in the West. Indeed, Dr. C. A. Scott tells us that all through the second half of the first century the possibility of a Parthian conquest of Western Asia was in the minds of all men. Here then is one bent on military conquest, and it may well represent one of the plagues which are to fall upon the haughty and persecuting power of Rome.

And when the second seal is opened, there is a figure called on to the scene which no one can fail to understand. The red horse and his rider, taking peace from the earth and causing men to slaughter one another, are just a symbol of war. It is one of the plagues that are to fall upon men.

And the next scourge is famine; bread is to be eaten

by weight—always a sign of scarcity. The earnings of a man will only suffice to buy him enough corn to keep him alive; nothing for his other needs will he have, and nothing for his children. The translation of Dr. Weymouth's New Testament, which I recommend, is "a quart of wheat for a shilling." It is famine—not of oil and wine, but of the necessities of life that is to follow as it so often did in the steps of war.

And following this on a livid horse the king of terrors to men, Death, accompanied by his invariable comrade Hades, so that with sword and famine and pestilence and the wild beast preying upon an undefended land, a fourth of the world is smitten.

It is not too much to say that in many parts of the world these were precisely the judgments which fell on men, and saving the wild beast they had fallen on Jerusalem in the appalling experiences of its siege and destruction. And the point of these visions to the distressed and suffering Christians in the last part of the first century was (1) Through all these convulsive experiences of judgment the world must pass before it would accept the Christ, and even through these His kingdom would be brought nearer; and (2) That all these wild forces apparently broken loose were really under control. I am much impressed by a phrase that is used in the case of three out of the four of these terrible shapes that are to stalk through the land. "*It was given unto him*," there was a limit to the power of each one. One of the great declarations of this book is that in the

last resort the powers that work devastation, and even the powers that work evil in the world, are limited and controlled—as they will ultimately be mastered—by God.

The visions which follow on the opening of the fifth and sixth seals stand by themselves. There is no voice calling "Come," now. The visions appear without any summons. The first is that of the souls of the Christian martyrs. Slain like Antipas in Pergamum. Slain by the Empire, "the throne of Satan," as he calls it elsewhere. Slain for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, and crying to Him who was the holy and the true to avenge their blood. It was one of the perplexities of John and his contemporaries, as it has been of martyred souls in all the ages, that God should permit such slaughter. And this spirit John is interpreting in his vision. He is not justifying it, though the probability is that he shared it. It is a cry for justice and for judgment, and the vision may partly have been governed by the well-remembered words of the Master, "Shall not God avenge His own elect?" I know that there are people who would be distressed by such a cry as this; they would contrast it with the prayer of Christ on the Cross and with that of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Well, let it be remembered that all martyrs were not perfect men; they did sometimes in earlier and in later days meet their executioners with fierce threats of the vengeance of God. And when one recalls the unutterably infamous barbarities of Nero one cannot

wonder at the cry. And under certain circumstances it would be hard to find fault with it. When one realises what has been done in our own time on the Congo, the nameless horrors perpetrated on its helpless tribes in the name of civilisation, one must be excused even from a Christian point of view for praying that some form of just retribution might fall, both for the deliverance of his poor victims and his own sake, on the inhuman monster who was responsible for the horrible crimes committed in that unhappy land.

It should be carefully noted, however, what is set over against their cry, perhaps in answer to it, perhaps an answer to the seer's own thoughts on the distressing subject of martyrdom. "There was *given unto them*"—you will note the recurrence of the phrase—"to each one a white robe," the symbol here of victory, a reminder to John and a reminder to the threatened and imperilled Christians of his time—a part of the message to be sent to them—that the growing army of martyrs were not to be regarded as so many slaughtered men, crushed by an irresistible world power, but as victorious souls who triumphed even in the hour of their seeming defeat, as every soul triumphs who is faithful to the truth.

And the other part of the message was that the work of persecution was not yet complete. The message in answer to the cry is in substance the message which came to the Church in Smyrna. "Fear none of the things that thou art about to suffer, behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison." God is not to

put forth His infinite power to stop the infliction of suffering any more than He sent twelve legions of angels to deliver His beloved Son, and to strike His foes with death. That does not seem to be the manner of His working. He does not govern by coercion. You could have no goodness worth anything were that done. He seems to give a lease of power to His foes as well as to war and famine and death. Only let this be remembered. The enemies of God are not what they think they are. They employ violence, but that is apt to defeat its own ends. The Roman Empire did not hurt the Christians whom it slaughtered, it provided the speedy way to the white robe and the crown. It afforded the finest opportunity which the world had seen for the display of courage and fortitude, and the sublime victory of patient endurance. And it did not hurt the Church. The blood of the martyrs was the fruitful seed of the Church.

The last picture presented to us in the chapter, and which appeared at the opening of the sixth seal, carries its own impression with it. It is a picture of convulsion and of judgment, sublime and awful. For one thing it may be pointed out that this cycle of visions carries us right through from the time in which the apostle lived until the end of the age, and if we read this book carefully we shall find, I think, that it consists of a series of such cycles. Again and again we are led up to some such convulsion as this. For another thing the passage is highly symbolical. The earthquake may

mean a great social and political upheaval, and the sun and moon and stars may stand for rulers of men. For yet another thing the words remind us irresistibly of the words of our Lord in which He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. And last of all, it is unmistakably a description of a day of judgment, when men in the searching light of God's presence shall be summoned to come face to face with their own deeds. The whole picture is one of dread and terror, in which the great and the strong are broken and terrified. The people of whom the Christians have stood in terror, who seemed to be possessed of invincible might, themselves stand in terror now, and their terror is the dread of a face in the light of which they know that they are guilty.

Out of all this sublime tumult one or two things clearly emerge.

1. This system of things, apparently solid and continuous as the stars and the mountains fixed in their places, is only temporary. One day the great break-up will come. This great, and as it seems to you, demonic world-power, cruel and unjust; these emperors whose statues you are bidden to worship; these magistrates and chiliarchs, pro-consuls and tribunes—what are they? Institutions that will topple and fall, crumble and pass. Only God and man abide. And by God man will be judged, king and slave, with a great moral judgment. There is such a thing in the universe as justice. It is centred in the throne of the universe. And there is such a thing as the wrath of God. Let no one think that the

sufferings of men that cause your heart to burn with holy indignation make no impression on God. Every man who wrongs another, king or serf, will have to reckon ultimately with Him who says "all souls are Mine." He who came into this world and could not sin could yet be angry, and there is no fire that burns in the New Testament that is half so awful as the indignation of Christ.

THE SEALING OF THE TRIBES AND THE REDEEMED THRONG

Rev. vii. 1—17

Something very like the first vision of this chapter is to be found in Ezekiel (chapter ix.) where a man with an ink-horn by his side is bidden mark a certain number of people in their foreheads before the slaughter of the city begins. And some faint resemblance to the latter part of the second vision may be found in Isa. xlix. 10. This fact need not disturb or distress us in the least. The writer is a Jew, saturated in the lore of the prophets to whom God spoke in vision in days past, and through the vehicle which He found ready to hand, God sent His revelations to him. For the rest this seventh chapter is a parenthesis; it seems almost like an interpolation. It comes in between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals of the roll, and it is interesting to observe that a similar parenthesis occurs between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets. Chapter vi. is a harbinger of coming judgment. A series of dread visitations passes before our view; war, famine, pestilence, etc., culminating in a great convulsion in which apparently the foundations of all things are shaken. In the eighth chapter another series of judg-

ments begins which runs through chapter ix. And in the *midst* of the judgments there is this pause of chapter vii. in which the seer may be taught something concerning God's own people and what happens to them when His judgments are abroad in the earth. We have two distinct visions in the chapter. We shall think of each separately, and then see how they are related to each other.

1. The first is the vision of the sealing. Like the vision that follows it, it is intended to be consolatory. The question might well have arisen in the mind of the seer, what will become of God's own people when these dread judgments come crashing on to the earth? And what follows is a vivid and realistic answer to the question. Angels are seen standing at the four points of the compass (they play a great part in many of the visions of the book), and a fifth angel with a signet ring, as though it were the ring of a monarch, a symbol of derived authority, and with a message to the four angels who were holding back the four winds. What does it all mean? No one would think of being literal here. That would be to spoil the whole narrative. You do not think of a signet ring from the finger of the Almighty pressed on to the forehead of His faithful servants. We are in the palace of imagery, graphic and forceful, and we see the truth enshrined in the images. And the truth is this, the forces that sweep with devastating might over the land are subject to the control of God. He will not govern men by force; but at the same time

He is no helpless ruler unable to say to any power, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." He holds "the winds in His fists, the waters in the hollow of His hands." There are really no ungoverned forces in the world.

And the second lesson vividly portrayed that it may burn itself into the mind of the apostle and his contemporaries is that *the Lord knows and will protect His own.* The storm is held back till they are made safe. There comes a story to mind from the Old Testament in which this same lesson is enshrined. The man whose righteous soul is vexed daily by the wickedness of Sodom is hurried from the doomed city, and the words of the delivering angel as he points to Zoar are, "Haste thee, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." As sacred as anything with the seal of the Emperor on it from the hands of spoiler and robber shall the true servants of God be when destruction is abroad. Safe as Israel in the land of Goshen; for the angel of destruction sees the mark and passes over whatsoever and whosoever is sealed.

And I must decline to be literal in interpreting them that are sealed. It is not in my judgment a prophecy that a certain number of actual Jews would be saved, twelve thousand of each tribe; that would be too mechanical. "Israel" has become by this time a spiritual term, "twelve" is one of the perfect numbers of this book, as "seven" is a symbol of perfection, and I, at any rate, see no better explanation of the term than this, that the

complete number of those who are the servants of God are known, and will be protected when the strokes of judgment fall.

It is interesting to notice the tribes that are omitted from this list. In order to keep to the sacred number, two are left out. Generally "Joseph" is omitted and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh take his place, while Levi is not named, but here Ephraim and Dan are omitted, for what reason we cannot tell save that there is a conjecture that Dan is likened to a serpent and the serpent stood to New Testament writers and early readers for the tempter of men. I mention this as showing that we must beware of a literal interpretation of the twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes. There are twelve apostles and twelve gates and twelve foundation stones in the Heavenly City.

2. The second vision is a great and noble poem and one hesitates to touch it, it so truly speaks for itself. Still, there are points to be noted in the wonderful picture, drawn by the Divine Hand on the canvas of the apostle's mind and transferred by him to these pages. There is no numbering now, for the host is beyond computation and they come from every land under the sun, an implicit statement at least that the Gospel of Salvation has been preached in every land and tongue, and a proof to the apostle's mind that the Roman Empire was not going to crush the Kingdom of Christ. It was going to spread into all countries, and whoever is seeking so to spread it is carrying out the intention of

Christ. Every nation; all tribes and peoples and tongues, contribute to the chorus of praise. That certainly belonged to the future as far as John was concerned. It was never true while he lived. The note begins here, in fact, which grows and swells as the book goes on—the note of the complete and universal triumph of Jesus Christ.

Yet this is not a picture of the end of all things. The elder who speaks to John uses the present tense in verse 14, "These are they which are coming out of the great tribulation," as though there were more to follow. And what is the great tribulation? Generally speaking, it has been regarded as a reference to the fierce persecutions under Nero or under Domitian. We may well include this and the fierce fire of suffering through which other martyrs passed, but we may also include the judgments which are foretold in these chapters.

And I hope, nay, I am sure, we may include all that happens to any of us to-day that can be classed under the term "tribulation."

The stories one hears of suffering, of people who, as you say, "are martyrs," and whose sufferings are worse than the short, sharp trials of the first Christian martyrs in that they are drawn out through months and years, sometimes stagger one's faith. And there are other tribulations than those that are physical. There are mental agonies and spiritual crises to which you can give no more accurate name than *tribulation*. What is to be said of the great tribulation through which Christian

people pass? This—*You will come out of it.* It is a long, dark tunnel, but there is light at the further end. Weakness, suffering, disappointment, fierce temptation, you will come to the end of it. Nothing is more certain than that.

And you may come out of it victoriously. The white robe here has been taken as a sign of purity. I have no wish to say that it is not, the redeemed have been purified through the blood of Christ. But you must not exclude the other idea—namely, that of victory. It belongs to the symbolism of this book. The palm is for joy and the white robe for victory. And it is victory through the blood of the Lamb. What does that mean? It means that they learned how to suffer, and to conquer in suffering, through the remembrance of the suffering Christ and through fellowship with Him. Much depends on the way in which we come through tribulation. We may be conquered in it. It may come to an end and leave us crushed and vanquished. The white-robed throng are those who have endured and triumphed. There can be no question that remembrance of the sufferings of Christ has fortified men for the day of suffering. "Consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Men can drink His cup of woe triumphant over pain. Apparently the sealed number are among these, and if it be so it will be concluded that sealing does not mean escape from tribulation. It rather means being protected in it and brought through

it, that what crushes a man who has no Christian hope is conquered by the man who shares the strength of Christ.

What is the condition of those who are brought through the tribulation? Evidently that of perfect satisfaction. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." I take that as a striking symbol of the fact that every craving will be satisfied. All questions that I find myself asking concerning the life that lies beyond are answered by that. They that come to it are satisfied. With what? The presence and service of God and the constant fellowship of Christ.

Three things stand out for me in this beatific vision: (1) *The Temple of God is everywhere.* Day and night these people are in it. The Lamb has become their shepherd, certainly an intimation that our Lord retains His oneness with humanity, with which He became man that He might redeem it. He leads His people, but wherever He leads them, there the Temple is. That is, the whole environment is holy. (2) *And they find their satisfaction in service.* They are not waving palms and wearing crowns merely, but they are serving with a service which never ceases, and which is eternal rest. (3) And then the throne of God is everywhere. No less than seven times the word throne is mentioned in this vision. You need not think of any material throne, but you may think of the absolute and perfect authority of God, and the perfect obedience of those about Him, and hence their perfect satisfaction and joy.

I believe as firmly as any man that this picture, like that of many in this book, is a symbolic representation of the blessed life which lies beyond this. But I also believe most steadfastly that it foreshadows a life the beginning of which may, and must, be here and now. Heaven is a continuation of earth. Heaven and earth are both God's dwelling-place, parts of the Father's house of many mansions. Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of His glory. Here, as truly as there, if not in the same degree, God may be realised, served and worshipped. And if the things of which this seer speaks are to give us satisfaction and joy in the world to come, they must do so now. They were heaven to him because they were the things that he had in a measure and longed for in their fulness.

THE SIX TRUMPETS OF REVELATION

Rev. viii., ix.

We have looked already at the visions which appeared at the opening of six of the seven seals. They were visions for the most part of coming judgments. They concluded with a picture of the general break-up of the existing condition, a picture of the terror of the great ones who now oppressed the people of God as His throne and His face became manifest. Then follows the vision of the sealed people and the white-robed throng innumerable before the throne. There runs through chapters viii. and ix. another series of visions of judgments weird and mysterious. They resemble in many respects the former series. It seems strange that after the end has apparently come, as it seems to have done at the end of chapter vi., there should be other judgments. What has to be remembered is that the lines of judgments are parallel and not consecutive, or rather that they are like some of those spiral tunnels in Switzerland in which the train emerges at precisely the same place, in that you see the same village and church which you saw five minutes previously, only now you are one hundred feet higher up. So each cycle of judgment visions brings you within sight of the end,

and the end is ever the triumph of God and His Christ and the confusion and overthrow of evil. For example, this series of visions ends in chapter xi. with the great world power yielded to the power of our God and His Christ.

There is another similarity in the two series of visions. A clear line of division runs between the first four and the remainder. In the first series the four horsemen successively appear symbolising war, famine, and death. In the present series some calamity falls on the inhabitants of the world. The vegetation of the earth, the fish of the sea, springs and streams and rivers are made bitter, and the light of sun and moon is darkened, and afterwards a visitation of locusts more terrible than any the world has ever seen, and finally, an innumerable army of horsemen sweep through the land destroying the third part of men. You read through these marvellous visions and you ask, What do they mean? What events do they describe? You seek the aid of commentators, and probably no two will give you the same interpretation. What are you to do? Say this is altogether incomprehensible and avoid the book?

No; remember the character of the book. It is apocalyptic. It is not intended to be taken literally. Its purpose is not to definitely foretell literal events. Its numbers have mystical meanings. Its visions are pictures in which great facts are wrapped up. For example, you ask when did it happen, or when will it

happen, that a third part of the earth will be burnt up, and a mass like a burning mountain cast into the sea, and locusts with men's faces and women's hair and crowns like gold, and horses with stings in their tails and emitting fire and brimstone from their nostrils, sweep through the land? The answer is, probably never. You have truth in parables, striking, vivid, lurid parables. Then what do they mean? Get to the standpoint of the writer. Remember who and where he was; remember the people to whom he wrote, their condition, their peril. Remember that he was saturated with Old Testament writings that he had read over and over and over again, how the judgments of God had fallen on the oppressor and evildoer in the past, of the plagues of Egypt, hail and fire, water turned to blood, locusts that ate up the land, and darkness that veiled the sky. Read and see if there is not a wonderful correspondence between some of those plagues and some of these visions. Go back to the Old Testament again. Read Joel's prophecy (Joel ii.) of the coming plague of locusts; and, again, Habakkuk's description of the coming of the Chaldeans, hasty and bitter, terrible and dreadful, with horses (an animal dreaded of the Jews) swifter than leopards and more fierce than ravening wolves; and tell me if you do not discern some likeness to the fifth and sixth visions? Remember another thing, that the latter part of the first century was remarkable for its volcanic disturbances; that the Bay of Naples was

devastated by an awful eruption of Vesuvius; that Patmos was within sight of some of these eruptive wonders, revealing to men, not only the titanic powers of nature, but to the devout mind the wondrous and awful might of God.

What then? Are these visions reconstructions in the seer's mind of scenes from the Old Testament and dread scenes in nature? Not precisely that, but may it not have been, is it not in accordance with the character of the writings and the circumstances, that through this familiar material God conveyed to his mind and the mind of others a great truth, namely, that the judgments of God fell at some time or other on all evildoers, whether they were Jews or Gentiles? What were the plagues of Egypt? Judgments of God on the oppressing people of Egypt. What were Joel's locusts and Habakkuk's northern army? God's scourge for His people. And whatever these visions may mean in detail, whether the clouds of locusts coming from the fiery abyss be, as Dr. John Brown suggests, a brood of heathen superstitions to afflict mankind or not, and whether the myriads of horsemen in the closing vision be the Parthians coming in their might against the power of Rome, or the later and ruder power that shattered it, or not, the meaning is that God is neither dead nor sleeping, but that as oppression was broken in old time and iniquity was visited with judgment, so it will be now. It is impossible that wrong should permanently be done, and

that iniquity, though clothed in Roman might, should prevail.

One or two points in the visions may well be noticed. (1) I take the vision of the locusts, the terrible vision of chapter ix., and I suggest that it must be altogether figurative. The fallen star may be an apostatised religious teacher, worthy to have been called at one time the angel of the Church. He may be like the woman Jezebel, the prophetess in Thyatira, teaching the "deep things of Satan." Through such teaching a whole brood of evil and destructive things may settle on human life, and men may be given over, as Paul says, to work all uncleanness with greediness. What do you say about certain things? I have heard the rule of the Congo described as devilish, and the unspeakable condition of the Chinese compounds in South Africa as "hell upon earth." "Hell let loose," one hears people say, and that is precisely what is said in chapter ix., verse 2. And these things become the judgments of God when they work themselves out in the injury and misery of those who promote and foster them.

(2) I call your attention to what immediately precedes the showing of these judgments. *The prayers of the Saints.* One of the first pictures in chapter viii. is the angel by the golden altar with the golden censer, in which is much incense to add to the prayers of the saints. One of the great scenes at the opening of the seals is the souls under the altar crying for redress, and one is reminded of Whittier's verse—

"O, from the fields of cane,
From the low rice swamp,
From the traders' cell,
om the black slave-ships' foul and loathsome hell
And coffle's weary chain,
Hoarse, horrible and strong,
Rises to heaven the agonising cry,
Filling the arches of the hollow sky,
How long, O Lord, how long?"[1]

What does the situation mean? How often must it have seemed to the oppressed Christians, and to John himself, that God did not hear. Often in Pergamum where Satan dwelt, where his throne was, that is, the local centre of the Roman power, their cries went up to God. Often in Patmos in the silent night John had poured out his heart in prayer, and nothing came of it. God did nothing. The earth was under the blight of pagan Rome, which was striving to make the Christians blaspheme, and determined in its insolent might to crush the faith. And there in chapter viii. is a picture which no one would think of interpreting literally. It is a striking and picturesque way of saying that in the silence of heaven God was listening to the cry of His persecuted saints, and that their prayers were heard and would be answered.

To those who feel some difficulty about the seeming savour of vindictiveness in the prayers of the saints, it may be pointed out that there is nothing vindictive

[1] "A Christian Slave."

in the judgments of God either in this world or the next. They are punitive, but never malicious. They are frequently the natural consequences and outcome of the deeds which men do in defiance of God's purposes and laws. Why, even so sober and scholarly an expositor as Milligan suggests that in the vision of the star called Wormwood falling from heaven, poisoning the waters and killing men, we have an illustration of the perversion and degrading of God's good gifts in the manufacture of ardent spirits—*fire-water* as the South Sea Islanders call it, and the very word *Wormwood* (*Apsinthos*) is a word carried over from Greek to modern French and English, for one of the most deadly of all spirituous liquors. If men will pervert God's gifts and turn them to harm, then God's judgment of suffering will fall on them. In some such way we may interpret the immunity of those who have the seal of God in their foreheads (ch. ix. 4). Some terrible physical malady evidently afflicts men, and the men who are free are the men who have been separate from the transgression that brought the penalty. You read the closing words of chapter ix., and you see the kind of people on whom the judgments fell. Think what worship of devils means, and sorcery or witchcraft and fornication and murder, and then cease to wonder that the judgments of God fall on these, and that they fail to fall on those who have the seal of God in their foreheads, set apart and kept clean for the pure and holy service of God.

There is one other point contained by implication in this passage, namely, that the purpose of all these judgments is to destroy the evil, and (see chapter ix. 20-21) to lead the evildoers to repentance. We may be certain that wherever God's judgments fall, that is their purpose. One of the most merciful laws of God is that which joins sin to penalty—violation of His law written in our hearts with suffering. The great purpose of all these judgments falling upon the nations is that sin may be swept out of their life, and that the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. For the time being they fail. The seer deems it necessary to record the fact twice over that the people who were not killed by these plagues repented not of the works of their hands.

Some of us have a theory that pain brings repentance. There are cases in which it only hardens. The goodness of God should lead to repentance. The chastenings and afflictions of God should turn the heart in obedience to Him. Sometimes they both fail. There are men who grow worse and worse under both, and our theory that suffering refines is often shattered by the hard facts of experience. It is a startling thought that there are people whom even the severest judgments of God fail to move; they harden rather than soften. Let us lay the fact to heart.

THE TWO WITNESSES AND THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

Rev. xi.

Probably there is no more difficult chapter to interpret than this, and none about which expositors have displayed greater difference of judgment. I approach it with great diffidence and offer without any dogmatism the conclusions at which I have arrived. In the interval of waiting for the sound of the seventh trumpet, these pictures of chapters x. and xi., are thrown on the screen. Yet they are scarcely pictures, but living scenes of which the apostle is not to be a passive spectator, but an active participant. In the first he is bidden to eat the little book, and in the second a rod is given him, with which he is bidden arise and measure the Temple of God and the altar and the worshippers.

The great and much debated question on which expositors are sorely divided is: Are we to be literal or figurative in our interpretation of this? Are we to consider ourselves in the realm of prosaic fact, or in the realm of rich symbolism and imagery? My own conclusion is that we must adhere to the symbolical and figurative interpretation, especially if, as I most fully

believe, the literal Jerusalem had been destroyed before this book was written. And for my own part I take the action of verse 1 to be akin to the action of the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand. One of the purposes of the measuring as of the sealing was that of preservation, and I take the measurements of the Temple—the inner shrine of the altar and the worshippers—to be for the purpose of preservation. And what is it that is to be preserved? The "Temple" here is the *vaos*, the inner shrine, and the altar and the worshippers. The outer court is cast out, and not measured—the unbelievers are to possess that; it was the place where the visitor might come, the Gentile, the unbeliever.

Now no one who stands by the literal interpretation here can find a single instance in history in which anything like this happened at Jerusalem. And I suggest that the interpretation is that in the storm of persecution and peril that is to break on the Church, while the outworks may be possessed, and while many who are only half-hearted will fall away, there will be an elect company, the true Temple, and true whole-hearted worshippers who will be kept faithful, and these will be kept secure, sheltered in the day of storm. And there is another interpretation—that the heart and core of what is represented by the Church of Christ is indestructible, as the further vision of the two witnesses shows. And there is still one more pertinent interpretation—that though the world-power might crush the

body of the Christian martyr it could not touch his soul or his character; that was holy unto the Lord and would remain.

Perhaps as many mistakes have been made about the *time* mentioned in verses 2 and 3 as about anything—forty-two months during which the Holy City should be trodden under foot and one thousand two hundred and sixty days in which the two witnesses should prophesy. For one thing it must be remembered that they stand for precisely the same period. The ordinary Jewish year consisted of three hundred and sixty days, divided up into twelve months of thirty days each, and it is a simple matter of arithmetic that makes forty-two months one thousand two hundred and sixty days. What is significant for us to remember in considering this writing of a man who was saturated in his national history, is that this was precisely the period for which the Holy City was trodden down of the Gentiles in the days between the Old Testament and the New. That Antiochus Epiphanes in the seventh year of his reign marched against the city in great anger and after a terrible massacre of the people defiled the whole sanctuary, offering a swine upon the sacred altar and sprinkling its broth all over the Temple. Unspeakable insults he heaped upon the people and their religion, ultimately setting up an image of Jupiter Olympus on the altar of sacrifice and compelling the people to engage in heathen religious observances. It was the darkest and most humiliating period in the history of the nation.

And the nation was delivered from it by the prowess of Judas Maccabæus, the brave and pious soldier raised up of God for the deliverance of His people. What is significant for our purpose is that the time of this awful oppression and humiliation is precisely the time named here, forty-two months, one thousand two hundred and sixty days, or three years and a half; the time and times and half a time of Dan. vii. And the significance of it for us further is that that never-to-be-forgotten time among the Jews passed into a symbol for a time of horror and darkness. And it seems reasonable to me at least to conclude that by means of this symbol and its associations the seer of the Apocalypse is foretelling a time of terrible suffering and trouble that is to fall on the spiritual Israel. That holy things will be defiled by pagan feet, and, as of old time the heathen sought to force the Jew under penalty and heavy persecution to betray his conscience and be untrue to his faith, so the same dread pressure would be brought to bear now and the spiritual Jerusalem would be ravaged and destroyed.

The two witnesses I take again to be the embodiment of the Christian witness. And they are two to make their witness sure. "In the mouth of two witnesses every word shall be established." And their persistent ministry seems to indicate that through the dark days of persecution the witness of the Church shall not be silent. They witness in sackcloth to show the sadness and heaviness of their burden, their sorrow at the

calamities that are befalling their people. Having power to shut the heavens that it rain not, and to inflict plagues on the people, they are clothed in the might and authority of Elijah and Moses. Something of miraculous power seems to be invested in them, since upon those who would injure them mischief recoils. Then in the end the miraculous protection seems to be withdrawn, and the beast that cometh up out of the abyss, of which we shall hear in another study, is permitted to kill them. This beast we shall meet again and again in our studies, and an explanation of him and his number will be given. What is important to note now is that precisely what is stated in chapter xiii. 7 takes place here, the beast for the time being is master of the situation—the power of evil triumphs.

I suppose that this was one of the sore perplexities of the saints in John's time, and one of the perplexities of his own mind. Rome seemed to be completely gaining the day. She had a way of her own of silencing the witnesses of Jesus Christ. She had silenced John by sending him to Patmos for the crime of being a Christian. It is one of the chronic perplexities of the human mind that God allows injustice and oppression, and allows it to triumph. This seems to be the prophecy of this chapter. It will happen again and again that the witness for truth will be overcome—the righteous cause be crushed and killed. Keep from being literal here, accept the apocalyptic symbol of the chapter, and there is brought vividly before you a frequently recurring

chapter in human history, right on the scaffold, wrong on the throne, the malevolent beast of the bottomless pit by brute force silencing the voice of truth. The witness for righteousness and justice driven from place and power, because he has dared to confess his faith and to lift up his voice against the current sins of his time. The dead body of the faithful witness lying unburied three and a half days in the street of the great city, a picturesque and forceful way of showing how completely the Christian faith in places where it was crushed and killed was scorned and dishonoured. So the papacy has sought in old time to crush and destroy the Protestant faith. So at one time it was attempted to crush and kill Nonconformity. Our forefathers rotted in prisons and hung in chains as a terrible warning to people who dared to call their conscience their king, and to obey God rather than man. So despotisms have determined to crush the spirit of freedom and justice as it has sprung up in the heart of the bondman and serf. That is what has led people to see in this book a prophecy of Napoleon and the papacy and what not. All tyrannies are very much alike, and are all of the devil in whatsoever time or land they may be found.

And their success is the standing perplexity of good people. That is a life-like picture drawn in verse 10 of the unholy glee which fills men's hearts when they have got rid of some haunting and accusing presence; of some one who dared to say, "You are wrong." If Jezebel can get rid of Elijah what rejoicing there will be!

If Mary Queen of Scots can only silence John Knox what mirth and gaiety there will be at Holyrood. What congratulations and exchange of presents when you have got rid of pestilent fellows who would turn the world upside-down by clapping them into prison. What hilarity will be in the wicked heart of Herodias if she can silence for ever the accusing voice of the Baptist! The marvel is that God allows wrong and violence to triumph.

But suppose for a moment that this is His only way of governing the world of men; that there must be scope for the free will of men; that there must be room for evil in a world where men are being trained and tested; that it is not God's method to prevent evil by coercion. It is the beast's method but not the method of the sons of God. Our Lord will not ask for twelve legions of angels to overcome His foes. He will not put forth a particle of His miraculous power to save Himself from suffering or to paralyse the arm that will smite Him in the face.

And yet in some mysterious way the power of evil is restrained. That is one of the constant lessons of this book. Until the two witnesses have completed their testimony they are guarded. Man is immortal till his work is done. And there is a bound and limit set to the power of evil. Constantly you read, "it was given to them that such-and-such a thing should be done," which means it was permitted. But beyond such a line the power of evil cannot go, and all the time that it is

working God has His faithful people in the shadow of His protecting hand.

One other suggestion on this line I make: that the way of defeat of God's servants is most often the way of their victory, and the completer their defeat the more full their triumph. While men look at the dead bodies of the slain and cast-out witnesses the breath of God enters into them, they stand on their feet in the sight of men, and a voice from heaven is heard calling them to everlasting triumph, to which they ascend in a cloud of glory. And I do not know what it means if not that the holy cause that has been battered and defeated and that seems to be crushed and killed will come to life again even as the Lord of truth came forth from the grave on the third day. The cause that was ridiculed and scorned and stoned and cast out in its representatives, and hated with a bitter and malignant fury of hatred, will survive and flourish again. You cannot kill truth, nor can you crush justice and freedom permanently. Every effort to do it will recoil on the head of him who makes it. Every victory won by foul means is a defeat. Men may kill the servants of the Lord as they killed Paul. They may pour out on them the vials of their scorn as they did on John Bunyan. The men are immortal and their memory will be covered with glory.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet brings the last of this cycle of visions, and like each of the cycles it brings the end into view. Whatever intervenes between the

time of the seer and the time of the end, there is never any uncertainty about the manner of the end. Each time it comes into view, and it does so several times, it reveals the complete triumph of Christ and the complete emancipation and glorification of His saints. Whatever perplexities there are now, blinding and bewildering, the end of all things to this seer as to Paul is the complete triumph of goodness. From one point of view it was a daring thing to write then when the Christian faith seemed in danger of extinction: "The kingdom of this world has passed into the hands of our Lord and of His Christ, and His Kingdom shall never be broken." It would be a daring thing to write even now so far away does it seem, and so slowly does the world turn towards the light. The important consideration for us is that this is not an audacious speculation or an elaborate calculation of this writer. Left to himself he would never have dreamt such a dream. It was a revelation given to him by that God who ever lives and moves, in a time when almost all hope seemed to have been lost. He could never have dreamt that one day the throne of Rome would be occupied by a Christian Emperor, any more than he could have dreamt of the corruptions that would flow into the Church from its connection with and patronage by the State. But this vision was given him of God, and therefore it abides as a shining star in the firmament until it is realised. It is the great hope of the Church—"the one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves." And we

must believe it and set our course by it. It will not come easily or cheaply, but it will come—through convulsion and struggle, through sacrifice and suffering, through bloodshed and martyrdom, through the apparent slaying and casting out of many witnesses, but it will come.

THE WOMAN, THE CHILD, AND THE DRAGON

Rev. xii. 5

The woman arrayed with the sun and with the moon under her feet and twelve stars for her crown, as well as the great red dragon wanting to devour her seed, are so clearly highly-wrought figures that not a word is needed to warn the literalist off the ground. As to its first meaning, I personally have no doubt that it is a highly figurative representation of the advent of our Lord and the events immediately consequent thereon. As for the woman, she is manifestly apparelled in light from head to foot. She is the ideal Church of God; the spiritual Israel who wrought and groaned and travailed for the coming of the Deliverer who should rule the nations. As for the great red dragon he is not Pharaoh or Herod, or the Jewish nation, or Rome specifically, but the impersonation of the evil spirit that animated them all in their opposition to the will and purpose of God. There is a supreme power of evil seeking to destroy the good everywhere, and the higher the good the more determined the power. So you read in the Evangelist: "After the sop Satan entered into Judas," and again, "The devil having put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot

to betray Him." What is important for us to observe is that, to John's mind—and he was under the influence and illumination of the Spirit of God—this power of evil, represented for the moment as a great dragon, red with the blood of slaughter, is on the watch to destroy the offspring of light as soon as it appears.

1. The first point to be emphasised is the antagonism against good with which evil is armed and inspired, the fact that the good is menaced from its very birth—which receives its strongest illustration in the experience of our Lord. We recall the fact that from the moment that He stepped from the long obscurity and quietude of Nazareth into His public life opposition began. The solitary crisis of the wilderness temptation represents a most determined attempt to destroy the Christ, that is, to turn Jesus away from the Christ purpose. And from the beginning He aroused opposition which deepened into fierce and angry enmity as the days passed by. And I have no doubt whatever that the lesson intended to be impressed on the mind of John was that goodness in the world will be assailed and fought against—that there is a restless and determined foe ever plotting and planning to destroy it wheresoever it may be found. Whatever your philosophy of it may be, whatever the explanation you attempt, there is the clear teaching of Scripture from the first book to the last; and I venture to say it is the fact of experience that good is everywhere menaced by evil, and that the Spirit of evil is ever seeking to hinder and destroy the

work of God in the soul of man and in the world. It is a very significant fact that the men whom we chiefly hold in honour, the great shining saints who send their light down the centuries, and whose names are frequently on our lips—as Paul, Bunyan and Luther—were men whose path was ringed about by virulent enemies who would have given all they possessed to have been able to destroy them.

Baulked of his purpose to devour the child, the dragon persecuted the woman, that is, the Church of Christ. Here, as over and over in this book, the great world-power is identified with the Empire of Rome, and John does not hesitate to say that it is the devil who is at the bottom of all this persecution. A time of fierce trial is upon the Church, a time which recalls the one thousand two hundred and sixty days in which Antiochus Epiphanes ransacked and ravaged and defiled the Temple and the Holy City. It was precisely in spirit what our Lord foretold. He wanted to gather men about Him who could face and endure the frown of the world and the assaults of evil—hardy and resolute men who should never be afraid of them that could kill the body, and after that had no more that they could do. Certainly one of the clearest notes in the teaching of Christ was that wherever and whenever good appeared and made itself felt it would be exposed to danger, threatened, assailed, harassed, persecuted. And the process of history has verified the word of our Master. Every movement for the emancipation of men, for

simple justice and freedom and equal rights, everything that makes for the realisation of the great principles of the Kingdom of Christ, equality, brotherhood, purity, righteousness, has been bitterly assailed, and often for the time triumphantly opposed. We know what the world did with the Son of God when He appeared, and the appalling fact is that the Church and the world were allied in the crucifying of the Son of God. And what happened to Him has happened in their measure to His faithful followers. Against them, too, the Church as well as the world has raised its hand; and where men have stood up and demanded in the name of Christ that inequalities shall cease and justice, equal justice shall be done to all, and that freedom of conscience shall be given to all, then the champions of privilege and vested interests and monopolies have arisen and declared it shall not be, and that things shall remain as they are. Oh, through what toil and struggle, through what bloody strife and suffering, the cause of truth and freedom has had to forge its way. And the very obvious fact of the conflict looming in the immediate vicinity has alarmed many a faint heart and silenced many a would-be advocate. Where is the use of striving for the right when the striving lands you in hopeless difficulties? "Why fight when closest fight ends in defeat?" Why labour to produce anything good when the dragon is waiting to devour it as soon as it is brought to the birth? And why take the side of that which is devoured when

it means that you will be driven into the wilderness? And I doubt not that a great part of the tempter's work on the minds of men is to exaggerate the difficulties, real as they are, which beset the path of the man who will give himself fully to Christ, and labour for the men for whom He has died.

And I venture to assert that the great and grave peril of this present day is not that we shall suffer, but that which was really the peril of many Christians in John's day, that we shall be untrue to our highest ideals for the sake of avoiding suffering. The flood of water which the dragon casts out of his mouth for us is not that of persecution, but of worldly allurement. It is wonderful how fond we are of comforts and conveniences and ease, and how little we are prepared to endure for the sake of a great cause. We get into the stream of comfort and pleasure and abundance, and we are carried by it so far away from the bare stable at Bethlehem and the bitter cross of Calvary, that while we idealise these things we are not prepared to shed a single drop of blood for the holy cause which they represent. There is the danger of to-day that we shall not be firm nor steadfast nor aggressive enough for anybody to attack us; that we shall be mastered by the sun and not by the wind; that we shall be among those who wear soft clothing and live delicately, and shall deem the chief end of man to be to escape from struggle and strife.

2. *Note the second lesson* in this chapter. It is one of the reiterated lessons of this book. There is Divine

protection and defence for the faithful. The child is not devoured, it is caught up to God and to His throne. Instead of being devoured it shares the eternity and the dominion of the Almighty. The woman has a place prepared of God for her in the wilderness, and the wings of the eagle are given to her that she may escape to it. Even the earth helps the woman against the dragon, and receives into its protecting breast the flood that was to carry her away to destruction, and in the place of safety provided for her she is nourished of God through the evil days. Few things in history are so striking as the persistency of the Church of Christ through days of persecution. Of the old Israel in Egypt it was said "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." And the same thing may be said of the Church of Christ. There is only one thing that can destroy her, and that is sin. Let her keep her purity and she is indestructible. It is beyond the power of the world to destroy Jesus. It can crucify Him and bury Him, but it is only thereby securing His wider influence and dominion. And what happened at Jerusalem is a parable of what has been taking place since, and is destined to take place. Wherever He has been crucified He has risen again. It is simply impossible that He should be vanquished. You cannot destroy truth. You have only to be sure that a cause is right and just and you may venture your all upon it, knowing that it will win, and that you will be there when the victory is complete. It is only the man who is too cowardly or

self-indulgent to venture anything that needs to be afraid. The honour of God is pledged to the triumph of righteousness, and in the end it will be proved that He has not made man in vain. All righteous causes are under His protection. What is needed to-day above all things is courageous faith in God, a faith that will risk and venture everything on His cause. I am greatly impressed with the attitude of the first disciples of the Lord, when they had come into conflict with the authorities at Jerusalem. A little feeble, struggling band of nobodies in the city, threatened by the august council of Priests and Elders, commanded not to teach nor to speak at all in the name of Jesus—what did they do? They had a prayer meeting and put themselves under the protection of God. And this was the burden of their prayer: "And now Lord behold their threatenings and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy word," that is, boldness to defy the authorities in matters of conscience. I am not surprised to read after such a brave prayer as that, "the place was shaken where they were assembled, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and spake the word of God with boldness," until the Sanhedrin itself was overawed and paralysed for the time being into inaction. There you have the ideal spirit; a spirit that will stand for what is right, boldly, uncompromisingly. It is our study of expediency, our capacity for making compromises and concessions, that loses us many a victory. At the bottom of it our lack of faith in God, and in the fact

that truth and righteousness are under His protection and must ultimately be triumphant.

3. The third lesson to be carried away from this striking chapter is that the power of evil is a defeated power. He is not only baulked of his prey in the case both of the child and the woman, that is much, that there is a place where his malign efforts cannot reach people, but he has been defeated. There is much discussion among commentators about the precise personality of Michael the Archangel, and it is very interesting, but I am not sure that any very satisfactory conclusion is to be reached, or that it matters very much. The vital consideration is that the devil is a vanquished foe; that in some places of God's dominion and by some persons, he has been overcome and finally cast out; and therefore that he can be overcome. Our Lord was born to prove that to men, and our Christmas welcome is the welcome of the Victor. And what is more, His followers have overcome. In verse 2 it is explicitly stated that the brethren who have been accused overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, which is a suggestion at least that it was in and by His death that Christ overcame. The point, therefore, to be laid to heart to-day by every tempted soul is that we are striving against a foe who has been conquered and whom we may conquer, and who, if I may put it in this way, is here that we may conquer him.

No one can explain fully the presence of moral evil in

the world. It is here by God's permission ; it is bound to be a possibility where good is a possibility. But whatever else there be in it this is certain, evil is here to be conquered. You cannot have a victory without a foe, and however strong the foe may be, it will ultimately be overcome. And it may be overcome by you.

THE BEAST FROM THE SEA AND THE LAND

Rev. xiii.

THERE has been perhaps as much discussion on the beast and *his number* as on any part of the book of Revelation, as much discussion and speculation. Alternately he has been the Pope, the Romish Church, Mohammed, Luther, Napoleon, and much more. What is to be remembered is that there are *two* beasts or monsters seen in this chapter, one coming up out of the sea, the other from the earth. The latter derives all his authority from the former, as he in turn derives all his authority from the great red dragon mentioned in the previous chapter, and who, being foiled in his purpose to devour the man-child and to really hurt the woman whom he persecutes, goes in great wrath to make war with the rest of her seed who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Here, then, emerges an interesting and important point. The dragon finds this monster ready for his use, and presumably by *his* means he makes war on the saints who keep the word of God. And it is this monster which John sees in his vision. He himself is standing in thought on the sand of the sea, probably

at his own beloved Ephesus or Smyrna, to both of which cities this book is first written and sent. The beast which comes out of the sea is obviously a creature which has travelled from afar, and it is also a power that has come to rule. The dragon gave him his power and his throne, and great authority. We know where the power of the throne and the great authority of the world were when this book was written, and under what throne and power and authority John had been sent to spend bitter years in hopeless servitude in Patmos. We know also that that power, so far as Asia Minor was concerned, was a foreign power. From over the sea it had come. We also know what power ruled or aimed at ruling (verse 7) over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. So far, the foreign nature of the beast, its present animosity to the saints, and its ambition for world-wide dominion all find in the Roman Empire their apt interpretation. While the leopard and bear and lion may well represent the brute force by which Rome was at that moment endeavouring to tear in pieces and destroy the Christian faith. Indeed, many brave and faithful soldiers of Christ had been literally torn in pieces, and devoured to make a Roman holiday.

Then what are the heads and horns mentioned in verse 1? The strong probability is that they represent the heads of the power of the Empire, the person in whom for the time being the power is vested—the Emperor. There were ten emperors if we begin with

Julius Cæsar, finish at Nero, reckoning in three pretenders to the throne, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius ; and seven if they are omitted. There were ten also if we begin at Augustus Cæsar and arrive at Vespasian, and again seven if these three be omitted. Another point of great interest is that while there are crowns on the horns and not on the heads, as though all ten, usurpers and all, were reckoned as rulers, it is only on the heads that there are names of blasphemy, and it is significant that the seven emperors, reckoning from Augustus and omitting the pretenders, all had temples erected in their honour and divine homage paid to them. That was the blasphemy to the monotheistic Jew—Nero the Emperor claiming divine homage. The Empire had come to the conviction that Christians, *qua* Christians, endangered the unity of the Empire and the safety of the Imperial rule. And it had deliberately chosen the policy that the people who would not do divine homage to the Emperor as representing the State, that is, "who would not worship the beast and his image," should be banished or killed (see verse 10). A bust of the Emperor would be brought into court when the trial of a Christian took place, and he would then and there be bidden to worship, on penalty of banishment—as John was banished—or death. And to a Jew like John, as well as to the Christians whom he had trained in the faith at Ephesus and elsewhere, any such claim as Rome made at that time was flat and horrible blasphemy ; the demand for homage which

belonged only to Jesus Christ, the sole King of the conscience and faith of men.

There is one of the heads which in this chapter and subsequently comes in for more notice than the rest. As Ahab persecuting Elijah was a type and standard of wickedness in Israel, so this head seems to gather to itself all the worst of the wickedness of Rome. "I saw one of its heads as though it had been smitten unto death and his death stroke was healed." The most reasonable interpretation that I can find anywhere of this is that which applies it to the infamous Nero, and the legend that was circulated everywhere, and especially in Asia, concerning him. That creature died from a wound inflicted by his own hand in an obscure house four miles from Rome. Very soon a rumour sprang up that he was not dead, that his death-stroke had been healed, that he was in hiding and would return at the head of an army of Parthians (*Tacitus*). It was a legend which persisted and was strong enough to induce more than one pretender to announce himself as Nero. And then towards the end of the century when it was no longer possible that he was alive, the legend underwent the modification that he was to return from the under world, and there were writings industriously circulated to that effect. The most reasonable interpretation of "the monster," therefore, is that it was the Empire with its emperors; and with Nero, the most bestial and cruel representative of its fierce cruelty, that it deals.

The Beast from the Sea and the Land

But what of the second beast? He comes up out of the earth. That is to say, he is native to the soil of Asia Minor. How perfectly reasonable it is to see in this creature the local representative of Roman authority, the Roman pro-consul at Pergamum—Satan's throne—compelling people to worship the Emperor in the great Temple to Augustus, and perhaps the local leader of the Emperor cult and priesthood called the false prophet hereafter. The image of the beast is the bust or statue of the Emperor. The making of fire to come down from heaven and the giving breath to the image that it should speak refer to the pretended miracles which the juggling and ventriloquial priests professed to work in the pagan temples of the time. There is another touch given to the picture in verses 16 and 17. Professor Ramsay tells us that in some parts of the Roman Empire certificates of loyalty were given to people who had paid the prescribed homage to the Emperor. That may be the mark of the beast, and what appears pretty clear from verse 17 is that there was what you would call a strict boycott of the people who had refused this same homage. And all this is written by a man who had seen it all, into whose soul the iron had entered, and who when these visions came to him was enduring the horrors of a terrible slavery in a convict settlement. There was the Church of Christ with the great world-power lifting its mailed hand to crush and destroy her. Sorcery, magic and human skill, and the mightiest military power of the world in

league with the old serpent the devil to destroy the faith of Christ.

And who is the initiator of all this? Who is the pioneer in the pathway of State persecution? Into whose head and heart did the devil first put the suggestion? His name is given in the last verse of this chapter. It is given in figures, probably because in Greek and Hebrew the only numerals in use were the letters of the alphabet, and not figures such as we have. So every man's name had a numerical equivalent, and it is certainly remarkable that the Hebrew letters which are the equivalents of these figures spell "*Neron Cæsar*," for 666—and the various reading, 616—finds precisely its equivalent in Nero Cæsar, which is the Latin writing of the name. I have entered into this full explanation of this matter to show the immense advantage of a strictly historical basis of interpretation of this wonderful book. There is, indeed, another interpretation suggested by Milligan in his valuable book on the Apocalypse. The number 6 was regarded with almost superstitious dread by the Jew. It fell below the sacred number 7 and signified inability to reach it. There was, therefore, a kind of doom resting on the number when it stood alone. But when it is tripled and you have three mysterious sixes following each other there is represented a weight of sin and woe and punishment which could not be surpassed.

Now you see the point of view of this writer. He saw the Christian faith threatened with the most

powerful and subtle foe that it had ever encountered. The determined attempt to crush it, the policy which made patriotism and idolatry identical, and loyalty to Christ treason to Rome, was simply diabolical. Whoever must have instituted the policy, it proceeded from that old serpent the devil, the dragon who had sought to devour the man-child.

And this comes home to us. How difficult it was in that day to be a Christian! How almost impossible! Literally, everything was against the Christian in Roman Asia. No one would trade with him, no one would employ him if his faith were known, at any moment he might be hauled before the magistrate and bidden to worship the image of the beast or be banished or slain. That was what it meant to be a Christian then. What does it mean now? No peril, and no suffering; the beast is gone and his image, so we think.

But if the beast has gone in one form it remains in another. It is the great world-power, and if it is not the angry snarling monster of John's day, it may be the purring and fawning creature which is still the beast. The power of the world, soft and smiling enough while you bow to its will, capable still of a snarl and a wound if you resist. The world is saying to us, in soft and alluring tones, and not with the threatening attitude which it assumed in John's day, "If thou wilt fall down and worship me all shall be thine." And many people are listening to the subtle temptation and yielding to its fascination.

I suppose there were people who listened in John's day, people who compromised with conscience, who bowed to the Emperor with mental reservation, who would say in their own defence, We did not really worship, and who said, We cannot isolate ourselves. If we are to live in Rome we must do as Rome does. If we are to live we must compromise. What are our children to do if we cut ourselves off from the world in which we live? We seem to be doing the same thing when we bow to the Emperor, but really we are not. God will know and understand. Besides, where is the use of setting yourself against the might of Rome? It will simply crush you as apparently it crushed John, who got himself silenced and banished, and who might have done much good if he had had the gift of compromise, and had been a little Jesuitical. So doubtless some argued in that day, and argue still. Where is the use of setting yourself against the fashion of your times? It may be unscriptural, but it is all-powerful, and you might as well be out of the world as out of the fashion.

Yet it was because people were not made of that plastic and pliable material, because they dared to resist the power of the dragon and the beast, that the power of both was broken and that the Christian faith survived and that we have any freedom to worship God.

I believe the peril from the beast is as great to-day as ever. It would require often an expert endowed with almost supernatural vision to determine and discern between the man of Christ and the man of the world.

There is such an almost universal bowing down before the image of the beast, such worship of success, of wealth, and of pleasure. There was a time when the policy of Christian people was to be as unlike the world as possible. Now it seems to be to get as nearly as possible to it without being absorbed. We turn away incredulous and almost indignant from the words of John: "If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." It is absolutely true; there is not room in a man's heart for the two loves; and in many hearts they are struggling for the mastery at this moment, and a whole army of people are as busy as they can be endeavouring to obliterate the line of division between the Church and the world, and they have nearly rubbed it out. There never was a time when the cry was more necessary than to-day for whole-hearted and complete devotion to Christ.

THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION

Rev. xiv. 3

Following immediately on the heels of that most depressing vision of the power of the beast comes this correcting, comforting vision of chapter xiv. We shall not understand it unless we see that its ground-work is the present and material. The crowd that John sees is standing not in heaven, but on Mount Zion. He hears a voice from heaven, but the people are on earth. They are not, as in chapter vii., "a multitude which no man can number," because they are definitely numbered, and the import of the vision to this man, to whom Christ and His Kingdom were everything—not the remote thing that they are to some of us, but the very life of his life—was: the beast is not getting it all his own way. Marvellous as it may seem that any can survive his dread power and cruelty, there is still a multitude on the earth who have not bowed the knee to him, who have refused to forswear allegiance to Christ and to offer divine homage to the Cæsar. They are untainted by idolatry or by the corruption that is in the world. The brand, not of Cæsar, but of Christ, is on their forehead, and He is in their midst, and the unseen world is profoundly

interested in this faithful band. Its music is about them—evidently music in which they join. *They*—that is the heavenly company—sing, as it were, a new song before the throne, and no man could learn that song save the one hundred and forty-four thousand.

It is to this *singing multitude* that our eyes are directed, with the Lamb in their midst. The fact that they can sing, ringed about as they are by enemies and threatened by danger, is exceedingly significant. They are not moaning and complaining. Singing stands for gladness, rejoicing, triumph; and these are singing in adversity, peril, tribulation. They are doubtless singing because they have become conscious of the heavenly music that is about them; but here is the fact: they have learned to sing in the midst of adversity and in the very teeth of peril. We are such slaves of the material that we wonder how anybody can rejoice who is not in comfort and ease and prosperity. Yet it is very seriously to be questioned whether increase of material good means increase of joy. It means, of course, that you can multiply what are called the pleasures of life; but I question whether the man who has prospered greatly is really happier or knows more of peace than his brother who has never prospered. Certain it is that struggle and peril have their compensations and a delight that is all their own. But it would be obviously wrong to trace the joy of this multitude to either their poverty or their danger. It is evidently in their moral and spiritual condition and their relationships. To put it briefly,

their joy is in their religion, and it is so deep and great that it requires a new song to express it.

Now let us see what their religion is ; the marks of it are in the narrative, and they are of the most precious value :—

1. It is the religion of the pure heart, and their joy is the joy of the pure heart. What an expression that is in the beginning of verse 4, if we cut it in two: "These are they which were not defiled." How much it means in the light of the foulness of that time ! How much it means even in our own day in view of the filthy stream that runs through the social life of our cities and close by the feet of our young people. How much it means to walk in white and to keep one's garments unspotted from the world ! What a conflict for us all to keep the heart pure even to its utmost thoughts and imaginations ! Those who have succeeded, who, in the words of Peter, have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, may well sing a song of thanksgiving. Their very condition makes for sweet gladness and joy.

2. Theirs is the religion of the true-hearted. In the midst of a false world they lived, where men were regardless of the majesty of truth, and lying was exalted into a fine art, when even religion was honeycombed with pretence, "and in their mouth was found no lie and not a blemish in their dealing." To the eye of the inspired seer, God is seeking to build up a community in the earth ; the foundation of an *eternal* city, from whose life these two black demons of foulness and falsehood

shall be exorcised. And of the city whose gates are open day and night, we read, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever maketh a lie"; against these things that kill joy and draw misery in their train the pearly gates are fast closed and closed for ever.

3. There is, however, a deeper mark of the religion and the joy of these people, and in it the secret of their purity and their truth is to be found—namely, a whole-hearted and complete following of Christ. "They follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." The words indicate a complete abandonment of the life to Christ. The Lamb is with them to command. They are with Him to obey. He is there to lead, they are there to follow. They have come completely under the spell of the authority of Christ. They regard themselves as His purchased property. They know that *He* loves them and claims them, and that all power is in His hands, and they trust Him absolutely. They know that tribulation, persecution, nakedness and sword will not separate them from Him, and that no power on earth or hell can divide them from His love. In His authority they find rest. They are not tortured by dread of what will happen because the main and vital thing is secure beyond the reach of the power of man or demon. And it is in their relation to Christ, settled and fixed, and the moral victory that springs from that relation, and the august and glorious fellowship into which that relation introduces them, that they find their joy.

Now there is a great contrast between the Christians of John's day and ourselves, and one could draw out the contrast along various lines between their peril and our safety, their poverty and comfortless lives and our conveniences, the scorn that was theirs and the respect that is ours. But one questions whether there is anything in which the contrast is much greater than in their joy. The apostle Peter wrote to Christian people who were in his own words rejoicing with a joy unspeakable and full of glory; and Paul describes himself as always rejoicing, and bids other people to "rejoice evermore." It would be a very simple and easy matter to prove that the whole idea of religion in the Bible, both of the Old and the New Testament, is associated with joy. How many times in the Psalter, the great song-book of Israel, are people exhorted to sing and exult! How many times this very phrase, "a new song" is used! The coming of the long-expected Deliverer meant the giving of the oil of joy for mourning, of the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And as for the early Church of Jesus, both in Jerusalem and Samaria, one of its most striking characteristics was its joy and gladness.

Now why are we less happy in our religion than Christians of a former generation? For we are. I do not think anybody would suggest that our modern religion is characterised by exultant gladness; that the people who see us who profess and call ourselves Christians are struck by our peculiar gladness and joy.

The Lamb on Mount Zion

We have a great many more pleasures, as we call them, than our spiritual forefathers had; we have a great many more amusements, and some which they would consider unlawful and worldly. But we have not the same joy and comfort and peace in our religion. And there are some of us who never think of associating joy with religion. We think of how the Christians of a former generation spent the Sabbath, devoting it exclusively to spiritual exercises and conversation and books; how early they rose, how they filled the day. We look on it as a species of self-denial, a kind of grievous yoke imposed, and we forget that it was the day of chief delight, so that they dared to think of heaven as a vast Sabbath and sanctuary whose whole occupation was worship. They sang with great fervour—

> "O when, thou City of my God,
> Shall I thy courts ascend,
> Where congregations ne'er break up
> And Sabbaths have no end?"

It is a sentiment which for the most part we cannot understand, which some of us have the bad taste to ridicule. A very little of worship suffices for us, and were it not for the force of custom and association, and were it not that it might excite remark and inquiry, we should avoid it oftener than we do, as many people do on their holidays to the distress and perplexity of the Christian people in the places in which they sojourn. It all seems to spring from the idea that religion is a duty and not a privilege; we are not keen on it. It is

a weary task and not a holy delight. We should some of us regard a person as almost eccentric who revelled in a prayer meeting and who spent evening after evening with his Bible. Religion is a duty which we ought not to neglect; that is as far as some of us have got, and that is precisely the way in which we bring up our children. Religion is a duty which it is foolish and dangerous and wrong to neglect, and not religion a privilege, a delight, a pure, sweet and holy joy. The world is absolutely sceptical about there being any joy in religion, and we are so influenced by the world that we have come to share its scepticism, and we go the world's way to seek joy.

There is one sentence in this passage which really explains the joy of this redeemed throng: "They follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." They go the whole length. It is the half-and-halfers, the people who believe in a modicum of religion, a veneer of form, a microscopical quantity, who never get so far as joy in God. I remember my father sitting in his chair an invalid for years, with all manner of things to trouble him. His sole resource was reading his Bible and singing hymns, and one of his favourite hymns began—

> "Joy is a fruit that will not grow
> On nature's barren soil,"

and another—

> "Jesus immutably the same,
> Thou true and living vine,
> Around Thine all-supporting stem
> My feeble arms I twine."

The Lamb on Mount Zion

There was a man, the first man I knew, who always associated religion with joy, and whose sole recreation was in his religion. I believe that the remedy for our joyless religion to-day is to be found in our imitation of this redeemed throng—in the complete abandonment of life to the control of our Lord. Some of us began that way, but we have drifted, and now we find our pleasure in other things. But this is true: they that "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," not just where they please, but always and whithersoever He goeth, find joy. It would be a small thing to say there is joy in religion, though that would be more than many would believe. The whole truth is not spoken till we state that there is a surpassing joy in religion exceeding in sweetness every other joy upon earth.

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

REV. xiv. 6—20

THERE are seven pictures in these verses. There are two groups of three angels appearing successively on the scene, and between the two groups there is one of the many representations of Christ the King (verse 14). The dominating phrase to me in the whole passage is "the eternal gospel." You hear much in some quarters to-day about the old gospel, and sometimes about the new theology. The true gospel is both old and new; as old as the sun which this morning arose in all the freshness with which he rose on the patriarch Abraham in his tent door, and as old as the ever recurrent spring and as new. The things that are in it are eternally true and always pertinent. They concern God—His righteousness and love, His justice and mercy; and man—his needs and sins, his possibilities for good and evil, his bliss or woe. They constitute a message to which man should be always ready to listen, because it is always the message of eternal truth—truth that never changes. And the gospel which this angel has to proclaim is not only eternal. It is also universal.

And what is this gospel eternal and universal which the angel has to proclaim? I do not suppose that the

whole of it is given here, but we may agree that part of it is, and we may agree further that nothing is given in this chapter by the other messengers of God which is at variance with the gospel, or which contradicts it. It is important to observe this, because there are things in this chapter which we do not always associate with the word gospel; the very term needs to be revised. We have been inclined of recent years to give an emasculated interpretation to the term,—what has been called a saccharine interpretation, which robs it of vigour and massiveness, of strength and virility, of power to pierce and wound, and even of power to stir the blood and brace up the moral nerves and sinews, and that is not the gospel of the New Testament.

Here, at any rate, is a part of the gospel: "God is great." He made the heaven and the earth, the sea and the fountains of waters. An essential part of the gospel of this book is its declaration of the majesty of God. It may have been because the throne of the Empire was such a living reality, but here the vision of God was that of supreme power. He was "He that sitteth upon the throne," who created the heavens and the earth, and before whose face they fled away. Rome could make many things, but seas and springs of water were beyond her power. And there was an infinite power filling the universe to which Rome itself was responsible.

And God was to be worshipped. Men have almost forgotten that to-day. The old awe that men felt at the presence of God, and even at the mention of His

name seems to be departing from us. I suppose it was departing from Rome, and if so it was one of the causes of her decline and fall. Men do not worship God now, they criticise Him. They even make a jest of His government. They think they know what He ought to do. There is no limit to our presumption. We forget the Lord our Maker, and are almost disposed to think that we have made and are governing all things. And we are worshipping the beast, or at least we are in danger of doing it. Who and what is the beast? Brute force, strength, cleverness, success which overcome everything. Are we not in danger of worshipping power howsoever used and success howsoever achieved?

There is another aspect of the rule of the beast, not absent from this book of Revelation, pointed out by Paul in his Roman letter and in his letter to the Ephesians, obvious to anybody who visits the ruins of Pompeii, namely, the gratification and indulgence of the desires and appetites of the body.

It can scarcely be doubted that the seeds of the decline and fall of Rome are to be found in the worship of the beast and the victory of the beast. I mean the complete triumph of the body over the soul, of the senses over the spirit. It is surely a lesson which is not to be lost upon us, that old civilisations have a tendency to get away from simplicity: they drift into self-indulgence. They lose the sense of proportion. They begin to fill up life with unnecessary things. Amuse-

ments, often empty and foolish, are multiplied, sport takes the place of strenuous labour. New methods of self-gratification are invented. All manner of luxuries are imported into life. Moral restraints are relaxed and removed. Vice and corruption steal into the life of a soft and self-indulgent nation. That was going on in Rome. According to verse 8, she was making the nations to drink of the wrath of her fornication. Undoubtedly "Babylon" here means Rome, and in chapter xvii. there is this fearful indictment lodged against her that she is the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth.

Now what has the eternal gospel to say to such a condition of things as that? Smooth and soft things? Would that be accordant with the universal instinct in men which as long as it is unperverted cries out against such things? Would it be accordant with the facts of history? Here rather is the gospel which the angel proclaims. The hour of God's judgment, the judgment of the moral governor of the world, is certain to come upon the nation and the individual that so far forgets and defies the high laws and purpose of its existence. The seeds of decay and ruin are most surely there, and they will bear their bitter fruit (verses 9–11). It would be a very daring thing to suggest that verses 9–11 are a part of the eternal gospel. They are appalling words, and quite repugnant to the soft temper of the present generation. They remind us of the terrible sermons which used to be preached fifty or sixty years

ago when a less kindly view of the Creator prevailed. Probably a modern explanation of the words would be that they were not inspired by the Spirit of God, but that they were the passionate imprecations of a man who was angry beyond all telling with the cruel and brutal persecutions which Rome was inflicting on the Christians, and disgusted beyond words with the self-indulgence and corruptions of Rome.

Let us think a little. Is that more kindly view of God of which I have spoken altogether more just than the sterner view that used to prevail? Granted some elements of injustice in that, are there none in our own? Has not that great and deep expression "God is love" been gravely misunderstood? Can righteous love never be angry? If a pure and righteous father sees one of his sons persisting in unrighteous ways; if he knows that he is cheating and telling lies and getting into debt, will he not warn him and proceed to even sterner measures? Will there be no moral indignation in his heart? Will he not determine that at any cost of pain the course must be stopped? Suppose, moreover, this son, who is giving himself to wicked and self-indulgent courses, is behaving cruelly and oppressively to his brother, whom he has in his power! Suppose he is making his life wretched with persecution because he will not join in his wicked ways—is there to be no anger? Would you give anything for one who could remain placid and smiling while all that went on under his eyes? Would not rottenness be at the heart of all

things if God could calmly tolerate wrong? And a part of the eternal gospel and of the gospel of the Apocalypse says that He does not; His anger burns against it. As Whittier says:

> "The wrong of man to man on Him
> Inflicts a deeper wrong."

And although we may always regard the wine of the wrath of God and the torment of fire and brimstone as figures, we may be sure that they represent dread realities that come upon people who yield to such sins as those in which old Rome was indulging.

There are few more unfair representations of things than those made by men who speak of God as tormenting people with punishment. Here is a case which came under my notice only a short time ago. A near relative of a prominent statesman in English life to-day has been worshipping the beast. In other words he has been living a life of self-indulgence. He is to-day an absolute moral wreck. Among his other vices he has given way, without any control, to strong drink. The passion for drink is in him a fire that is never quenched. He is tormented with *delirium tremens* and requires watching night and day. Who is it that is tormenting him? Is it not a fact that he has had his life in his own hand, and against remonstrance, against the prickings of conscience, he has elected to wreck it and is suffering now, and probably will to the end of his days, the inevitable consequence of his own lawless living. A part of the eternal gospel written on human history, on shattered

nerves, paralysed will, ruined careers, and lost souls, is that there is certain and inevitable judgment for the men who violate and refuse the just and holy laws of the righteous God. According to the latter part of the chapter there is a harvest. The cry goes forth " Thrust in the sickle. The time for sowing is past ; the day to reap has arrived." " He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

And now there is another part of the eternal gospel which seems to be contained in this chapter, viz., that it is always well with the people who keep the commandments of God, which are also the highest laws of a man's being ; always well with people who worship God, which is also the worship of the highest, purest, and best and holiest. For the fact is not that men stand between two thrones of arbitrary power when they stand between good and evil. It is this : that it is only the good that is the right ; it is only the good that elevates and ennobles. The other power degrades and enslaves and ruins. And here is the gospel. It is always well with the man who worships and obeys the highest. And the call of the gospel to these people is to stand firm amid all the allurements and threatenings of the world-power centred in Rome. The allurements were many. The temporal advantages of going with the current and the corresponding disadvantages of standing out of it were enormous. To refuse to worship the Cæsars was to stand convicted of treason. That was the subtlety of the law as it related to Christians. To refuse participation in question-

able heathen customs was to be boycotted and banned. And there were some who were doing it. There were a few—even in Sardis, that sink of corruption—that had not defiled their garments ; and there were some, even in Pergamum, where Satan's throne was, the local seat of the Roman Government, who had held fast and had not denied the faith even in the days when Antipas and many others were martyred among them who lived where Satan dwelt. There (verse 12) was the endurance of the saints, and there were those who at all costs kept the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. And here comes in the saying that we so often read when our dear ones go from us : "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." With us it often marks a peaceful passing. Here it meant, not a falling asleep, but a violent death. They could die in the Lord, they could not, even in face of death, be untrue to Him.

And the application of this part of the eternal gospel to us who believe in Jesus is surely an appeal to stand apart and separate from the world. It appeals to us on the physical side and it appeals with tremendous force. There is an enormous pull exerted on our life in the direction of physical pleasure and delight. "The lust of the flesh," as the New Testament calls it, is always with us, and is most persistent and aggressive, and it is not in its most revolting forms that it appeals to us. To some, perhaps more than we know, in this form it appeals. But there are other forms—away from simplicity of life, away from the life of strenuous labour, in

the direction of self-gratification, self-indulgence, self-advertisement, and self-display. On the one hand is a life of simple faith, strict devotion to Christ, a life of strenuous self-denial, a life lived to bless others, to serve men, to help to save the world and bring it to God. On the other hand is a life of self-pleasing, going with the throng, seeking the path of the least resistance, getting money to spend it on our own pleasures. The choice is still between the worship of Christ and Cæsar-worship; the throne of God and that of the world; the supremacy of the spiritual and the supremacy of the physical; the senses and the soul. May we have wisdom to make the choice definitely, and definitely to keep the choice made!

BY THE GLASSY SEA—THE MARTYRS AND THEIR SONG

Rev. xv. 2—4

We may believe the author of this book had often seen the sun sink in fiery splendour into the sea, of which we read so much in this book, and reddening its waters. "A sea of glass mingled with fire." And perhaps it seemed to him like the blood-red pathway of a violent death along which the martyrs had passed out of sight, because they refused to deny their Lord. And we may reasonably infer that two great questions were likely to rest upon the heart of the apostle and to weigh it down. (1) Why was all this havoc and slaughter of the saints permitted? The vision of the throne of God was partly the answer to that question. And (2) what became of those faithful souls who had passed out of sight?

That last is a question which has always deeply stirred the heart of men. "How fares it with the happy dead?" is one of the questions of Tennyson's great poem, *In Memoriam*. It is never an unholy curiosity that asks the question, rather is it an unholy dulness that never inquires.

> "Give me the wings of faith to rise
> Within the veil, and see
> The saints above,"

is the prayer of one of Watts's hymns. I must confess that it is a longing which I often cherish concerning those who are gone from us. Well, for this man the veil is lifted. The holy curiosity is satisfied. To him it is made clear all the way through that the people whom Rome has cruelly tortured and slain are living, and living in infinite bliss and peace. The previous message had been "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." This message is, "Victorious for ever are the dead." They have triumphed, and that gloriously.

Note carefully the description of them here. Not "they have died," but "they have gotten the victory over the beast," or "they come victorious," and the expression means that they have become permanent victors. What a significant and amazing expression it is! They have gotten the victory. You may be sure Rome did not think so. Rome thought that it was stamping and burning out a most troublesome heresy. These people had been killed. By hideous and revolting tortures they had been put to death, and their God had not appeared to deliver them. They had defied the decree of Rome that they should worship the beast and his image, and Rome had arisen in her might and had crushed them. And that, Rome thought, was the end. The vision of the seer says, "They overcame." There is nothing more certain in this paradoxical world than this. The hour when goodness seems to be defeated is often the hour of its greatest victories. It is true in smaller matters when you refuse to return blow for blow,

scorn for scorn, insult for insult. When you silently endure, when you quietly but firmly decline to be moved from the pathway of conviction and of loving service by threatening or penalty, you overcome. When you suffer wrong you sometimes by patient endurance overcome the wrongdoer, and turn the tide against him. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him," etc. And it is true in greater matters; brute force and violence generally defeat their own ends. And on the other hand patient suffering wins its victory.

There never seemed a greater defeat for any cause than for the cause of Christ on the day of His crucifixion. Then all seemed lost for ever. There was never really a day of greater victory.

I quote one of our hymns again:

> "I sing my Saviour's wondrous death
> He conquered when He fell."

Evil never really conquers, save when you yield to its baneful influences and allow them to enter your life and rule and sway you. These people who were killed by the world really triumphed over the world. They refused to do its bidding, to follow its fashions, to conform to its customs, to bow down at its shrines. They successfully resisted all its attempts to win or drive them from their absolute loyalty to Christ. They said, We can suffer and we can die, but we cannot be disloyal, we cannot deny our Lord. It was in the power of Rome to kill them, but it was not in her power to compel them to deny their faith. And to the vision of the apocalyptist they

had been as completely victorious as Moses and the Israelites who were delivered from the hand of Pharaoh. Through the Red Sea of martyrdom these people had passed, but it was the path to freedom and to life. And his vision beholds them, not charred or mangled corpses, but living souls standing on the other shore, beyond the power of Rome, the sea of death rolling between them and their persecutors.

And the vision would surely bring to the mind of the man who saw it, and to those to whom he showed it, the message of the Master in the days far off, but well remembered, "Fear not them that kill the body and *after that* have no more that they can do." They not only sang the song of Moses which was the song of deliverance from the power of their persecutors, but the song of the Lamb—which means the song of Him who had guarded their souls from evil, had helped to keep their garments clean and their loyalty and courage unbroken through the fiery ordeal through which they had come. Broken in body they were unscathed in soul. They had died, but they had kept the faith.

If there is anything of truth and reality in these pictures—and there surely is—if at the close of this brief life we pass into a state of conscious existence, and also into the vivid consciousness of the existence and nearness of the infinitely holy God, and if we carry with us memories—which is entirely reasonable—of our life here, we may surely conclude that one of the themes of deepest gladness will be the memory of fidelity to

conscience, to conviction, to Christ our Lord. There will be a deep and overwhelming gratitude for the mercy which forgives faults, failures, cowardice, disloyalty; a spirit of wonder at the amazing grace that blots out such transgressions. But there will surely be a deeper and sweeter joy, a purer and nobler gratitude, where there is the memory of unbroken fidelity. That though the storm gathered and broke the house stood, that though the fire was kindled the work was not consumed. That neither allurement nor threatening prevailed. That we were neither drawn nor driven from the path of faithfulness and duty. No one doubts the joy and wonder of the forgiven. But the joy of the victorious is greater and sweeter, and this is the joy that is set before us in this vision and throughout the whole book. The great promise is to him that overcometh. I am not aware that there is any greater joy now to the earnest Christian soul than the joy of victory. To have planted your feet on the neck of lust; to have broken the power of an evil habit; to have resisted a subtle temptation; to have refused a bribe, a solicitude to wrong; to have kept your hands and your heart clean; to have fought the devil in any of the manifold forms in which he appeals to you, is the most thrilling and exalting experience that the soul can know, and it may be yours and mine. It may follow even on the heels of defeat. Every victory, moral and spiritual, is the storing up of eternal memories which will be a source of everlasting joy. Perhaps there is no more bitter memory

than that of failure through moral cowardice—moral failure for the sake of ease or comfort or gain. The ease or comfort or gain purchased at such a price are corrupted at their source and bring their possessors no song of gladness.

Note the theme of the song. You have not only the singing multitude with harps, but you are permitted to overhear the words of their song. And you observe at once that they are not singing of their own achievements. They seem to have forgotten their sufferings. They are absorbed and thrilled with the vision of God and the contemplation of His character and works. The song has a threefold strain as it pertains to God. It speaks of His works, of His methods, and of His character. His works are great and wonderful, His ways righteous and true, His character holy—that is, morally spotless and perfect. I am quite aware that this conception of God does not differ from the Old Testament conception, that we might be listening to one of the old Jewish psalmists, that something else might have been added, something of the tender mercy and love of God. Someone might even suggest that there is something of the Old Testament sternness and severity and even fierceness in this book. And it could not be denied.

What needs to be remembered is (1) that these were the very things that these people had probably been in doubt about in their earth life, and especially the last part of the song, that all the nations of the earth should come and worship at the feet of God. Unrighteousness

seemed prevalent. The ways of God seemed strange. He seemed to be doing nothing. He had not delivered His suffering people when they had cried to Him. By fire and sword and exile, by the fury of wild beasts and of savage men, they had been assailed and killed. So far from worshipping God, the nations were being compelled to worship the Emperor and his statue. May not this be the point of the vision? These people who had come into the clear light saw that things were not what they seemed. There was not a stain upon the character of God, there was no change in His righteousness. So far from doing nothing He was working out in wonderful ways the advancement of His kingdom by these very persecutions. Evil was over-reaching itself and defeating its own ends.

The old dream of psalmist and prophet was true, not false. God was, and He was righteous and holy, and still sat upon His throne judging righteously. Whatever appearances might seem to indicate, He was still "King of the ages and the nations." The vision simply confirms the high hope and the great faith that had dwelt and burned in the breast of the Jewish nation, to which this man belonged, and which had inspired their best living and their highest achievements. (2) Further it must be remembered that all this is an essential part of the hope of the gospel. You know the great and familiar words of Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first

and also to the Greek." But finish the quotation, "for therein is the righteousness of God revealed by faith unto faith." And the next verse, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. i. 16–18).

We must beware lest we lose the virility of the gospel, lest we turn it into a soothing mixture which leaves men with the impression that no harm can ever come to anybody, however evil he may be, and that there is no inevitable penalty and consequence to wrongdoing. That is not the gospel of the New Testament. It is all of a piece with the Old Testament in declaring the absolute and inflexible righteousness of God. I rejoice in the doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood as taught by our Lord, but let us remember that to Him and to all the New Testament writers, the Father is always righteous and always King and Judge of men. I have no gospel to preach apart from the perfect justice and righteousness of God. And the message of this book is, He will be righteous to saints and sinners, to the Church suffering and wronged, and to the world, and to Rome which has oppressed and tortured His saints. I for one refuse to believe that this New Testament seer is misinterpreting the nature of God or the mind of Christ when he speaks of the wrath of God. Our intelligence is finite and limited, but it is impossible for me, at any rate, to think of an Infinite Being, the holy and righteous Ruler of the Universe, looking upon the oppression and wrong done to weak and helpless

people, and especially to people who love the right and try to do it, and are therefore persecuted—without indignation. The universal instinct of humanity, Divinely implanted as I believe, is that somehow and somewhere retribution overtakes the evildoer; that the man who wrongs his fellows will have to reckon with Him who is the God and Father, the King and Judge of us all. That is a part of the song of the redeemed, and it harmonises with the song of the ancient psalmist, "Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad, let the trees clap their hands, for the Lord cometh to judge the earth in righteousness."

The only other thing I desire to dwell upon is the prophecy and hope expressed in this song. "All the nations shall come and worship before Thee." That, I am aware, is a quotation from the Psalms, and expresses an ancient hope, but it would not surprise me to be told that the hope had grown dim in the mind of the apostle and seer. It was the most unlikely thing that could have happened. The wide-spreading Roman Empire was antagonistic to the faith of both Jew and Christian, and it requires some effort of imagination to enable us to perceive the audacity of the faith of Paul, that in the name of Jesus every knee would bow, Jew and Gentile would be found the wide-world over kneeling at the feet of the same Master. To many people it is a hard matter to believe even now, so slowly does the world roll out of the shadows of the night. Yet if there is anything of truth and reality in this

vision, if it meant anything to the writer and the readers of the testimony of this book, it meant that they who have passed from us into the clearer light, and who see things with larger other eyes than ours, hold it and rejoice in it, and would send the message to us. It means that they are interested in the turning of the world to God, and they see that by His great and marvellous works, His righteous ways and the revelation of His holy character, God will turn the world to Him. Nay, may we not say, *is* turning the nations to Him? Let us hold the faith, for it means this—that righteousness shall prevail over evil, justice over oppression, truth over falsehood, that the rightful and only Lord and King of men shall come to His own. Through conflict, through great and terrible judgments, through many a seeming set-back and defeat, yet as surely as the spring cometh after the winter, so cometh the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

THE SEVEN BOWLS

REV. xvi.

THIS may truly be said to be one of the dreadful chapters of the New Testament—the description of a series of judgments which are to fall upon the earth, and which are seen in vision by the writer of this book. In our last study we were made to think of a sea of glass mingled with fire, on the further shore of which we saw a singing crowd rejoicing, as Moses and the Israelites rejoiced over their deliverance from Pharaoh. Then came a vision of the Temple and of seven angels or messengers of God issuing forth clothed in white linen, and each afterwards bearing a golden mystical bowl, "full," as the writer expresses it, in his impressive phrase, "of the wrath of God." Now we need go no further than that word to see that the whole language of the chapter is figurative. We may not doubt that there is such a thing as the wrath of God. We have no more right to doubt that than we have to doubt the love of God. If we may think of God approving we may also think of the Divine disapproval. If we may think of there being joy in the presence of the angels of God we may also think of there being sorrow. If the moral Ruler of this world can be pleased, He can be displeased;

and the idea that connects emotions and passions with the Deity is altogether scriptural and true.

But you cannot be literal and think of a *bowl* containing the wrath of God, and of such a bowl being poured out on the sun or on the sea. You realise at once that you are moving in the midst of all the luxuriant imagery of a vision. Here is the conviction burnt into the mind of the seer. It is the same in the vision of the seven seals, and also in that of the seven trumpets, which in many points closely resembles this. There are great and terrible judgments to fall upon the earth, especially upon the great world-power of Rome. Wrong, like the oppression and the torture of the saints of God, cannot go on. The power that inflicts it cannot continue and prosper. Awful are its deeds, unutterable is its life, awful will be its retribution.

It may be granted again that the writer seems to be living in the atmosphere of the Old Testament. It is undeniable here, as in the vision of the trumpets, that he is back in the old days of the oppression of Israel by Egypt; that he believes—and it has been shown him in vision, whatever may be the source of his vision—that the God who saw the afflictions of His people of old time and plagued their oppressors saw the suffering of the saints to-day and would not forget. And who dare suggest that this is not true? Who dare deny the assertion that every wrong done by one man to another registers itself upon the mind and heart of God? And is not that man fatally mistaken in the name of eternal

justice who suggests that there is no retribution, that the righteous laws of God can be defied with impunity? The song of the redeemed company by the sea of glass mingled with fire, the voice of the angels of the waters in this chapter, and the voice of the altar all unite in this: "Thou art righteous, O Lord; just and true"—not vindictive—"are Thy ways and Thy judgments." There is no gospel for men apart from such a belief as that.

It is obvious at once that in several of these judgments set before us so luridly in this chapter we are back among the plagues of Egypt, as in the seven seals. The grievous sores on the bodies of men, the turning of the waters into blood—even human blood—the darkness that fell on the kingdom of the beast, the drying up of the river Euphrates, the terrific storm of hail—you are back in the convulsive times in which, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm, Jehovah delivered His people from the tyranny of their foes. And the great and burning conviction of the seer, running through all this series of judgments, is that the God who heard the cry of Israel and came down to deliver her will hear the cry of his oppressed and suffering people in his own day. But we may well remind ourselves that the minds of men have habitually gone back to that struggle in similar circumstances. It was so in the great struggle for the abolition of negro slavery in America. There never lived a gentler soul, or one who believed more surely in the breadth and depth of the love of God, than Whittier; but in proportion as a man believes in the

tender mercy of God for the weak and suffering will he be found to believe in the righteous indignation of God against all who inflict suffering. And when the emancipation of the negro slave was completed it was the gentle-souled John-like Whittier, who sang—

> "Loud and long
> Lift the old exulting song;
> Sing with Miriam by the sea,
> He hath cast the mighty down;
> Horse and rider sink and drown;
> He hath triumphed gloriously."

It is quite true that patience under suffering wrongfully inflicted is one of the leading doctrines and exhortations of the New Testament. It is equally true that retribution for the oppressor and those who inflict the wrong is one of its leading doctrines. There would be something rotten at the foundation of all things if there were no judgment upon the evildoer and the opposer of the Kingdom of Christ.

There are some profoundly interesting and instructive lessons in this series of judgments, and I pick out the points that may be emphasised.

1. There is this general lesson rooted in the minds of the Bible writers: that God uses the great powers of nature to rebuke, to chastise, to correct, to instruct men. Famine, earthquake, drought, heat and storm are servants of the will of the living God, doing His bidding. Personally, notwithstanding all the light which science has shed, I am not prepared to surrender that belief. I

refuse to believe that it was mere chance and accident that there was a storm of wind that scattered and destroyed the Spanish Armada which menaced the political safety and the religious liberty of England. The men who held by this and kindred beliefs may have been unscientific according to the jargon of modern speech, but they were illumined by the spirit of truth. I still believe in the words of the Psalmist, " He maketh the winds His messengers, the flaming fire His minister." And this New Testament saint, the author of this book, believed it. The stars in their courses can fight against men. A storm can hinder a work of evil and can wreck some scheme of unrighteousness. And what is more, we may think of him as seeing in the titanic forces of nature, terrific and awful in their devastating work like the convulsion that buried Herculaneum and Pompeii, symbols of the judgments of God on a corrupt and lawless world.

The close of the first Christian century was remarkable for its volcanic disturbances, and it is probable that from his place of exile John had known or heard something of them. At any rate, if we may go to the last picture in this chapter, he had seen some terrific storm sweep over the island, of thunder, lightning, and hail, in which the islands fled away and the mountains were not found (verse 20). Everything was blotted out, as it is on such a fair spot as Lake Lucerne when the storm breaks. So it seemed to him would darkness settle on the kingdom of the persecutor, and the

judgments of the Lord sweep over the decadent empire.

2. The second lesson in these judgments is that there is some reminder in them of the crimes which those upon whom they fall have themselves committed. They have inflicted wounds and physical maiming upon others. There falls upon them a noisome and grievous sore. Of course this may be a result and consequence of the grossly self-indulgent and corrupt living which characterised Rome at that time. But *this* also may be in it—they are made to feel something of the physical torture which they inflicted upon others. Into their own bosom were repaid some of the evils which they had inflicted upon their victims. Their waters are turned to blood to remind them of the human blood which they had cruelly shed. They are burnt and scorched with the fire of the sun as if to remind them of the torches made of living human beings lighted with diabolical glee in Nero's garden. To people guilty of such revolting and enormous crimes it seemed to the apocalyptist that the ordinary forces of nature would become charged with power to hurt, and sources of blessing changed to sources of torment and injury.

3. The third lesson seems to be that there are movements of God in history as well as in nature. There is great divergence of opinion concerning the meaning of verse 12, the effect of the pouring out of the sixth bowl; but the meaning most probably is that obstacles, like the river Euphrates, which are in the way

of armed kings coming from the sunrising—the far East—will be removed by Divine power from the path. Here I may refer again to the prevalent belief or superstition concerning Nero who had died in A.D. 68 ; first of all that he was not dead and would return ; and secondly, that though he was dead he would return, from the underworld and with the Parthian kings, to attack and subdue Rome. The meaning of the vision is the old lesson, surely written in history, that God does use one nation for the chastisement and punishment of another, and that even natural defences like rivers and mountains, and created defences like drilled and disciplined armies, are overcome or removed by the power that governs the world.

I return to the broad general lesson which I do not desire to root out of my mind, which it would be disastrous to destroy or weaken in the minds of men, because it is true and not false, namely, that Divine judgments, chastisements, retributions, are great facts in human life. There is a living Ruler over the affairs of men, and He rules in justice and truth. We talk of nations being self-governing. There is no such thing as absolute self-government. It is only within the narrowest limits that men or nations can do as they will. There is a power behind nations, communities, families and individuals, shaping, directing, controlling. They are pulled up here and there. "Thus far shalt thou go and no further," is the fiat. There is a barrier, and you cannot overleap it, a trend and course of history which

you cannot alter. There is a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may.

Nothing seemed more invincible when this book was written than the might of Rome. Nothing seemed so likely as that she would be the mistress of the world, but this man alone at that day foresaw her downfall. And surely he saw this—an unalterable law—that whenever nation or individual steps aside from the path of justice and purity, when it begins to practice self-indulgence and oppression, it is doomed. It may flourish for a time like a green bay tree, but it will pass away, and its memory will be a shame and a reproach. There is a God that judgeth in the earth, and by terrible things in righteousness His judgments are made known on the selfish and corrupt and the wrongdoer.

Then observe the result of the judgments of God as they appear in this chapter. You know we have a theory that suffering softens, that penalty brings penitence. We quote the scriptural saying, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness." That is generally true, and that is the purpose of all retribution. Let that be settled. In all penalty, chastisement, suffering for wrongdoing here or hereafter, the purpose of God is to destroy the evil and save the man. But we all know that the purpose sometimes fails—as other purposes of God do—through the wilfulness and perversity of man. You have in this chapter the spectacle of men suffering for their sins. They are in agony for their misdoing, they believe

apparently that God has sent the suffering, but there is no repentance. "They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they repented not of their works." And everybody can find such people, and for anything you know they will be always found in this world and the next. People who are not softened by their sufferings but hardened, made worse and not better, embittered by what everybody can see is the result of their own neglect and folly, a result of which they were warned, men, that is, who have flung away their chances and come to want; they blame the world, they condemn their friends, they curse providence, they hate the hand that chastises, they blame everybody but themselves. It seems to be an increasing tendency of human nature to be rebellious and defiant when a touch of trouble or suffering falls upon the life. We all of us need to beware lest that which may be the chastening of God, intended for our profit, be allowed to harden and embitter the heart it was meant to soften and to cleanse.

There are people whom neither mercy nor judgment can cure of evil ways. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar, with a pestle among the wheat, yet will not his folly depart from him." They are incurable in their folly. God grant that we be not among their number.

There is a remarkable picture in these visions, with which I close this chapter. It may account for the blaspheming of which I have spoken. All the kings of the

earth are gathering together to a place called in Hebrew Harmageddon. I suppose it means all the kings over which Rome reigned, for she is the instigator of the great assembly. The place where they gather is the scene of great Hebrew victories—the victory especially when the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. They are gathering because unclean spirits, issuing like frogs from the mouth of the wild beast and the dragon—which are all symbolical of Rome or its emperors or of the satanic influence under which Rome seems to be—have gone forth and infected them. Either they are going to get rid of the intolerable sufferings described in the previous verses, that is, to abolish the judgments of God, to do away with the consequences of evil doing, or they are going to crush the cause of Christ in the earth as Jabin, king of Canaan, and Sisera, his general, were going to crush Israel. Whichever it be, this is clear: they are going to fight against God the Almighty; that was what Rome was doing when she arose to persecute the Church. It is what everybody is doing who opposes anything that is right, any person or any cause. And there can be only one end to that conflict. You may know at the outset which power will be ultimately defeated, put to confusion and broken.

Here is how it appeared to the ancient psalmist. He saw the forces mustering who were going to abolish the reign of God in the earth, and he said, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." It is to him so unutterably absurd

that men should set themselves against God. But they do it, and entrenched behind such a power as that of Rome's legions they think they will overcome. The writer of this book, with something of the old Hebrew awe, sees a power infinitely greater than all the powers of the world leagued together, and he loses all awe and dread of Rome. The breath of all men is in the hand of God. The seismic disturbances are symbols of His power. He shakes the heavens, the earth, the sea, the dry land, all nations, and will establish the Kingdom of His Son.

KING OF KINGS

Rev. xvii.

What a blessed change has come over the face of the world, not only since this book was written, but during the last two hundred years. And John saw it coming. By the illumination of the spirit he saw the day when the souls of men would be free from political bondage. It was a great and daring faith. You may remind me that it was shown to him in vision; but the faith was manifested in his unquestioning acceptance of the vision. Take the first part of this verse 14: "There shall be war against the Lamb." That was the grim fact of his time. Harmageddon was beginning. The political powers of the world were being leagued together in bitter hostility to the aggressive forces of the Kingdom of Christ. It was war against the Lamb, and at the back of it all was Satan, but it was war that would end in the victory of the Lamb.

There can be no doubt in the mind of any unbiassed reader that it is the power of political Rome that casts its dark shadow over this chapter and over the whole book. She is the Babylon, as she is in 1 Pet. v. 13. That is her name in the cypher in which the book is written. She is the woman arrayed with purple and scarlet, decked with gold and precious stones and pearls—the

Imperial City, the Eternal City, as she was called, the proud, luxurious, and corrupt mistress of the world. I know, of course, that a certain school of prophecy teaches that what John sees in vision is papal Rome. She is the scarlet woman. She is, as John Knox described her to Mary, Queen of Scots, the Roman harlot. It cannot be denied that there are unmistakable resemblances. Nor is that to be surprised at. For from the time when Constantine (doubtful blessing) adopted the Christian religion and became its patron, the Church became more and more modelled on the plan of the Roman Empire with its dignitaries and orders.

But there is no need in any sober interpretation of this chapter to go beyond what John knew. Here is the simple and natural interpretation. The woman is the Imperial City. The seven hills on which she sits (verse 9) unmistakably indicate that. The scarlet-coloured beast upon which she sits is here and everywhere in the book the political power of Rome, sometimes regarded in the abstract; sometimes personified in its emperors. The many waters upon which the woman is said to sit (verse 1) are explained in verse 15 as being peoples and nations and tongues, and in the last verse she is described as reigning over the kings of the earth. The seven heads and ten horns of verse 3 refer, as Professor Ramsay says, respectively to the emperors and the provinces of Rome, and the names of blasphemy, of which the beast is full, may reasonably be interpreted as referring to the temples erected to the *Roma dea*—the

spirit of Rome incarnated in the different emperors who claimed—and Domitian was one of the most insistent—to be worshipped as divine. In the eyes of a Christian man who saw the throne of Christ and bowed before it, this was no other than rank blasphemy.

There are some cryptic utterances in the chapter to which we have not the key, but much is clear. The name harlot refers doubtless to the gross and revolting sensuality of Rome, of which you find proof enough in Paul's letters, and of which her own historian Tacitus says, "Rome where all kinds of enormity and filthy shame meet together and become fashionable."[1] The scarlet and purple, etc., refer to the luxury and pomp, the self-indulgence of the city; while the phrase, "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus," obviously has reference to the wild orgies of the persecution of Christians carried through by Nero and apparently revived by Domitian. To Rome went the martyrs to suffer in the name of Christ, and there their blood was cruelly shed.

There are two points of considerable difficulty in the chapter, and yet our key of the historical situation helps us to open the locked mystery. There are seven kings in verses 10 and 11 which seem to be identical with the beast, which plays so great a part in this book. They surely mean the different Roman emperors—though there is much perplexity in counting the numbers—from Augustus, who is really the first emperor, to Nero, who

[1] Century Bible, C. A. Scott, *ad loc.*

is the fifth, and Domitian, who is the eighth genuine emperor. Nero had died when this book was written; probably he was the one who "was and is not," and when we read "he is to come," we are again reminded of the persistent rumour that he would return from the underworld, a kind of Antichrist imitating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The more serious part of the allusion probably is to Domitian. He was the eighth emperor, reckoning from Augustus and leaving out the pretenders. He was Nero *redivivus* to the eyes of the Christian. As John the Baptist was Elijah over again, so Domitian was Nero over again in his blood-thirsty cruelty practised on the followers of Christ. The old bad days came over again in him, though in a different way. The other difficulty is the "ten kings" (verse 12). They are evidently some power rising up within the empire—of one mind first of all in persecuting the Christian faith; then by-and-by turning with the Emperor against the Imperial City, as Nero turned against it, burning it with fire and hating it, as Ramsay tells us some of the emperors, with purely their own ends to serve, despised and hated Rome.

The point of view of the chapter is that of the despotic power of kings arrayed with their might against the Church of God. We may be thankful that we have not that power to reckon with to-day. It is not political power that we have to dread. But there is a foe in the field. There is still war against the Lamb, and the foe is in some respects more subtle and more dangerous

than the open and avowed foe in the Roman Empire. I do not think anybody can deny that there is opposition to the throne of the Lamb, to pure zealous Christian living and Christian influence. Here is a thing that has been true for nineteen centuries. It is the mystery of iniquity. It is here in this book. It could be put into any book dealing with Christian history at any period. Men have always been at war with Christ. There have always been men who have resisted the highest and finest Christian influences. There is not only the awful trinity of drink and gambling and sensuality, but other influences. In one age and place, brute force has been employed to crush the faith of Christ; in another allurements and seductions to draw men away from it. "Not force," says the wily tempter, concerning our Lord, in Milton's "Paradise Regained":

> "He must with something sudden be opposed,
> Not force, but well couched fraud—well woven snares,
> Ere at the head of nations he appears
> Their king, their ruler and supreme on earth."

The dangerous person is not always your open and avowed foe, but your pretended friend. Rebecca Sharp, that most odious creature of Thackeray's creation, pretended to be everybody's friend, and she was well nigh the ruin of everybody towards whom she feigned friendship. There is nobody so dangerous as a false and fawning friend, and the devil is never so dangerous as when he is arrayed as an angel of light. In Bunyan's

"Holy War," Diabolus offers to surrender Mansoul to Emmanuel on the condition that he may supply the preachers for all the pulpits of the town. The devil threatening and thundering at the door of the Church with swords and spears is really less dangerous than the devil in the pulpit of the Church toning down enthusiasm, cooling zeal, abolishing all idea of sin and of the need of conversion, drugging people with ceremonialism, teaching from his coign of vantage destructive heresies. It is putting the Christian label on Pagan things that is the peril—covering a worldly and selfish heart with a veneer of religion. It is the introduction of the worldly spirit and worldly principles and worldly people into the Church under the guise of friendship that is the peril.

And perhaps the greatest peril of all is that we may be resisting the Kingdom of Christ and may not know it. Before this man is shown what is wrong with the world it is significant that he is shown what is wrong with the Church. And this is wrong with one Church at least—self-deception. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, etc., and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Of another it is said, "Thou hast a name that thou livest and thou art dead." And I gather that a man may be a foe of Christ and all the time be deluded into imagining that he is His friend. So let every man watch his own heart.

The last note to be struck in this verse is the characteristic note of the whole book, namely, the victory of

Christ. In spite of false friends and powerful foes it comes. And yet that is not quite the last note, there is another, "They also shall overcome that are with Him." Not the Church in Ephesus or Smyrna or the rest, but the souls in or out of these Churches who are *with* Christ —the believing and loyal souls in all the Churches who have cast in their lot with Christ, accepting the world's reproach and scorn, accepting hardship and suffering for His sake. Called and chosen of Christ, and accepting both the calling and the choice; and faithful, through evil report and good report; with Christ in the day of His suffering, sharing His reproach they will share His victory. Here it is the world *can* be overcome —its threatening and its allurement, its trials and its irritations, its lusts and its fascinations. The world and the flesh and the devil can be overcome. Note the phrase "*with* Christ." He has overcome and He still overcomes in the struggles of those who are linked to Him by faith.

BRIDAL AND BATTLE

Rev. xix.

THE eighteenth chapter of Revelation is a great poem. In most vivid and stirring paragraphs it describes the tragic fall of Babylon. The whole chapter is strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament, of the poetry of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and we are bound to admit that it is conceived in the Old Testament spirit. The pomp, the splendour, the wealth and pride of Babylon are all suddenly swept away in a great and awful catastrophe. The traffic in precious stones, in purple and silk, in wood and ivory, and in the bodies and souls of men, is brought to a sudden standstill, and there is solemn joy among the hosts of the Lord at her overthrow because she was rotten at heart with a great immorality, the great harlot that defiled the world. It is a poem, and as such it is to be regarded. The literalist is out of his element peculiarly in this book. Undoubtedly in the first interpretation Babylon stands for imperial and pagan Rome in her decay, with her corrupt life, her opposition to the cause of Christ in the earth and her espousal of what Thomas Carlyle calls the devil's cause. It does not trouble me that no such sudden and complete

overthrow fell upon the city of Rome. I read into the poem a wider meaning, namely, that self-indulgence, corrupt morals, oppression of men, traffic in their bodies and souls, resistance to the cause of God in the earth, which is the cause of purity and truth, freedom and righteousness, spells ruin ultimately for nation and individual, even the strongest and proudest. For a while it goes on and it seems as if judgment were asleep and truth and righteousness were dead. Men think in their delirium of success that they have found the secret of life when they give the rein to their lower nature and ignore the restraints of God's holy law. Really they have found the secret of misery and decay and death. Wherever the vices of old Rome are admitted and prevail, there judgment waits and often it falls swiftly. That is the belief and teaching of the writer of this book. It is the belief and teaching of the prophets of the old covenant. God and righteousness must prevail.

Immediately after all this appears once more the Church of Christ. Not this time the Church in Ephesus or Smyrna or Pergamum, but the whole body of redeemed people, the true Church of Christ, and it appears under two significant figures in this chapter—poetic figures like those of the previous chapter. The first is that of a bride. The second is that of an army, clothed as the bride is clothed in heaven or on earth, in raiment pure and white. A bridal and a battle is the subject of the chapter and it is to be regarded as pure

symbolism with its deep lesson for the people of Christ in all centuries and all lands.

1. Consider the first figure: *The Church, the bride of Christ.* It is familiar enough, wonderful as it may seem. Like many of the rich figures of this book it is carried over from the Old Testament. There, in marvellous symbolism, God is represented by the old prophets as wooing Israel, espousing her to Himself. What does it mean? There is not only the profound and pure love on the part of Christ which such a figure necessarily involves, a holy and undying passion, but there is this in it. The Church consists of those who have made the pure and full response, who have been won, who have given up all others and have gone over with their whole heart to the Lord. They belong to Him, by the surrender and love of their lives. Wherever you find such people—and thank God they are to be found—in whatsoever church—Roman Catholic or Protestant, Established or Free Church—loving the Lord with a pure passion, surrendered to Him, belonging to Him in body, soul and spirit, desiring no other—there you have the true Church of Christ.

The contrast may be brought out in the two figures of this chapter. The first is the great harlot. The second is the true bride and the faithful wife. Forsaking all others and cleaving to Him alone as long as life shall last—that is the solemn covenant between the Lord and the Church. The cry has gone forth concerning the corrupt and faithless world in the midst of which the

Christians of that day were called to live. "Come forth out of her, my people, that ye have no fellowship with her sins." There is no true conception of the Christian vocation until we perceive it to be a call to separation. In spirit, in temper, in fashion and standard, we are to be separate and if that be not a fact, if there be no difference between us and the world, then is our religion a deceit and a pretence. For this figure means belonging to Christ in every part and passion of our being. It means love for Him. It means consideration of His will and obedience to it in everything. It means that there are no secrets in the soul hidden away from Him.

Of course, we have to consider what the figure means from our Lord's side, what tender love it means, what protecting care, what power and willingness to provide and to shelter, to uphold and defend. It sets before us, as no other figure does, the supreme value which our Lord sets upon the Church. How precious His people are in His sight! This is how Paul expresses it, not in apocalyptic phrase, but as a stately fact, burning and glowing in his heart: "Even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."

We often speak of the love of Christ for the world. It is an undoubted fact, and it is the one hope for

the world, but we have need to think of His closer and dearer love for those who have responded to His love with the trust and love of their own hearts. They are His own, as the others are not. They belong to Him as the branch belongs to the tree, and as the limbs of my body belong to me. My hands may and ought to do service for others but they belong to me and are a part of my very life. So is it with the Church and Christ.

We may well also consider under this expressive figure *what comprises loyalty and fidelity to Christ.* It is surely not a matter of act and word only. It is a matter of thought and desire, of will and affection. It is not the union of a master and a servant which may last for certain hours in a day or certain days in a week. It is a union of absolute love and surrender which pervades the whole life. In a mystical sense we are one with Christ, so that Paul can say again, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and in language which seems to soar above us, "I no longer live, Christ liveth in me," or as our Lord Himself prays, "Even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in us, I in them and Thou in Me." It means that we have no will, no purpose, no life apart from Christ, or, to quote Paul again and to be true to our figure, "To me to live is Christ"; as a devoted wife might say, "I live for my husband"; or a devoted mother, "To me to live is my children." What Christian is there to-day who is not rebuked as he contemplates his life in the light of

this figure, who does not feel that he has fallen almost hopelessly below the ideal it sets before him? Our union with Christ, let us confess it, has been of the loosest and slackest kind. We are placed in church fellowship and in families that we may help one another in the path of devotion to Christ. We are truly, if we believe, a part of the Holy City, the mystical Jerusalem, called in this book "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." We might ask ourselves whether we have not before now played the part of the disloyal and unfaithful, or, at any rate, of the neglectful and careless wife. It is so wonderful a thing that it is difficult to speak about it, but this much is certain. The one thing we have to do in the world is to be faithful in heart and love, in thought and purpose, to our Lord in everything. There is the secret of our separation from the world. You live in a world that does not make it its business to obey or to consult the will of Christ. It consults its own will and does what is convenient and expedient and what for the moment brings pleasure or gain.

Our primary and pressing business is to be faithful to Christ, not to ask whether we are succeeding or failing to impress the world favourably, filling our buildings or emptying them, whether men scorn or honour us. Better a half empty and despised church with loyalty to Christ than a church packed to the doors with admiring crowds at the cost of absolute fidelity to Him. If this should be written of any Church for the same reason that it was written of Him—"from that time many of its disciples

went back and walked with it no more"—blessed is that Church. It may be going into the wilderness, but it is on the way to the promised land of the Lord's inheritance. Let me insist upon it. The first business of the Church is not to cater for the public, to compete with the music hall and the theatre. It is to be loyal to Christ. And the important question to ask is not—Are the buildings half empty? That is the question the newspaper asks. Our question is—Are we the faithful spouse of Christ? If that can be answered in the affirmative there is really nothing to trouble about. It is in this very book that we read of a Church that had everything that the wiseacres who write about us in the newspapers would covet and praise, and was quite satisfied with itself; and Christ was kept on the door-step, knocking, but not admitted. Everything—wealth, numbers, public favour—all but the one vital thing without which a Church is not a Church, namely, the presence of Christ and the spirit of obedience to Him.

It is perfectly clear from the latter part of this chapter—if I may stray over into the second figure for a moment—that the Church which is loyal to Christ, composed of those who follow Him on white horses, clothed in fine linen pure and white, as the Bride is clothed, is not in favour with the world. I read in verse 19: "I saw the beast"—the political power of Rome—"and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse and against his army." That was a

great reality in the day when this book was written, and in many a day since then. And it is not an army with shields and swords or with rifle and cannon. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood" in that fashion! It is a battle in the spiritual realm, a battle of ideals, a battle of words — a battle in which harsh criticism, social scorn, contempt, unbelief, hatred of pure goodness, play their part. And what the Church has to do in the midst of it all is to refuse to be moved from her absolute loyalty to her Lord; to refuse to sell the least scrap of her allegiance for the highest honour the world has to give. The Church has not to be popular, she has to be true to her union with her Lord and Master.

The other thing—if it is another thing—is, she has to be good. Union with Christ is not an empty sentiment, it is not a barren fact. Here is what verse 8 says: "It was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure," and for once the figure is interpreted as we go along—"the fine linen is the *righteous acts* of the saints." The union of the soul with Christ is not merely a glowing rapture which the outsider cannot understand. Its manifest result is character and service. The one thing that is certain is that Christ can make those who are joined to Him like Himself, and likeness to Christ means both beauty of character and worth of service. "He that abideth in Me and I in Him the same bringeth forth much fruit." The one thing the Church of Christ has to seek after supremely is good-

ness. It is the one thing, according to that great passage of Paul which I quoted just now, that our Lord covets for the Church, "*A glorious* Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that it should be holy and without blemish." That before and beneath and through all other things. Not to snatch some temporary prize of popularity, but to seek the permanent and noble quality of character out of which the permanent noble service alone will spring. We are to seek this amid good or ill success, whether men cling to us or fall away from us. It is *that* which is going to conquer according to the rich imagery of this book. It is the white-robed army that comes to victory. It is character that wins, and not feverish activity that merely wants to be on the winning side.

And character fruitful and victorious, white and pure, fine and beautiful, with the glint and glory of goodness shining on it, is acquired through union with Christ. "*It was given unto her* that she should array herself." That is the testimony of this vision. Goodness is possible through union with Christ. And goodness is the main business of the Church. It is written, "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy."

To speak very briefly of the second figure in the chapter, the figure of the warriors following the Son of God to battle, it should be said that in this warfare goodness is more than half the battle. The people who are strong and do exploits are the people who do know their God. *Being* is absolutely essential to *doing*. And

this is open, thank God, to the simplest of us. It is only here and there, a very few times in the history of the world that a great shining genius like Paul arises. We can never have his immense gifts, but we can have his goodness. The same Lord is accessible to us all, and the same grace.

THE ENEMIES VANQUISHED

Rev. xix. 19—xx. 10

We are dealing here with a peculiarly difficult section of this book so far as any clear interpretation is concerned—a section on which the most diverse and contradictory theories and explanations have been based. On the latter part of this chapter, dealing with the millennium, or the one thousand years, innumerable and conflicting books have been written and theories propounded. The Greek word for one thousand, is Chilia, and at one time the Church was flooded with Chiliastic literature on one side and the other. There was to be a literal period of bliss, of absolute immunity from the temptations of the devil—lasting precisely one thousand years. Whether this period would precede the second Advent of our Lord, or immediately follow it, was one of the matters in keenest dispute. With certain people these matters became far more important and urgent than personal holiness and the conversion of the world. Indeed, I need scarcely remind you that there is a body of Christian people to-day of whom one would desire to speak with the greatest respect though he entirely differs from them, who hold that the world never will be converted in this dispensation, but will grow worse and

worse until the Lord shall come in visible presence to reign upon the earth and to put all things right.

What needs to be said at the moment is this : that if the principle which has been insisted upon throughout these studies had been carefully observed, many a fierce dispute would have been avoided, and also many a grotesque interpretation. Always remember that the book belongs to a special class of literature, the Apocalyptic, that the events it describes are not chronological. The same things are presented to us over and over again in different figures. And numbers, names, and places (like Jerusalem and Babylon), and times, are symbolical, and of some of the symbols we have lost the key. You have only to read a verse like that of chapter xix. 17 or 21, to realise that you are in the midst of most luxuriant poetry. Or if you come to chapter xx. and think of Satan as a spirit or principle of evil, as probably we all do, pervading the world and finding access to the hearts of men, it is impossible to be literal while you read of an angel with a great chain and a key opening a trap-door, and, having caught and chained this evil spirit, forcing him through the door, shutting, locking, and sealing it for a thousand years. We know that we are in the midst of strong poetic representation as we are when we read that the moon shall be turned into blood. Nay, you are in the midst of pure symbolism. Attempt to be literal at any point and you miss the meaning of the book and are likely to get into the neighbourhood of the grotesque.

Let us look at the story of this section, and then let us try to gather up the lessons. It is a story of struggle and conquest as so much of the book is. The Church has been represented to us in the section immediately preceding as the bride and the army of Christ. The metaphors mingle as the New Testament metaphors often do. The Church is united to Christ, not for the purpose of enjoying bliss with her Lord, but that she may be led out by Him to do battle. Nearly always in this book the Church of Christ is to play her own part in the resistance and mastery of the false and wrong. The promise all through is to him that overcometh. They overcame through the blood of the Lamb. They wash their own robes and make them white. It was given unto her that she should array herself in white raiment. Whether the Church be in heaven or on earth, in this book, it seems to be the warrior Church, the white-robed army of the Lord. She is united with Him for the purpose of overcoming evil, both within her and around. So we come to the first part of this story.

1. The beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gather to make war against Christ and His Church, verse 19. All the way through, the powers mentioned in this story, the beast, the false prophet, the dragon, the old serpent, represent almost certainly in the first interpretation the political power of Rome, elevated on one side of it into a religion with its temples and priests and prophets who pretend to work miracles,

and are all animated and inspired by the great adversary in whose existence the Jewish people believed from the days of the book of Job. These are combined to thwart and destroy the Church of Christ, and the most diabolical means are adopted to accomplish it. And here apparently they come into final conflict.

However people may differ in their interpretations of this passage, and they do differ almost hopelessly, there is no difference of opinion, nor can there be, as to who it is that sits on the white horse and who goes forth to war, nor as to who they are who follow Him, the called and chosen and faithful. This, therefore, emerges as a clear lesson. The pathway of goodness is never an unobstructed pathway. Explain it how you will or leave it unexplained, here is a fact, even though goodness be embodied in a person so pure and perfect as our Lord Himself, it has never been allowed to go on its way through this world unresisted. Perhaps in the present dispensation it never will. In a school, in an office, in a warehouse, nay, in a single individual soul the path of pure goodness is never an unopposed path. Always it is challenged and tested and tried as gold in the fire.

Under the highly figurative symbol of a battlefield, this writer views the great conflict between Christ and His army on the one hand, and the great world power and the power of a false religion on the other, as John Bunyan sets the great spiritual experiences of men before us in the figurative language of the "Holy War."

And as the armies of old time going forth to defend their country and conquering put those who had threatened their peace to torture, so, under these highly-coloured figures, he sets forth the great struggle between the cause of Christ and the powers that oppose it, and the victory of the Lamb. Nobody need be literal. To be literal is to be lost. The lake of fire which burneth with brimstone, and the abyss are purely figures derived from the volcanic region and disturbances with which this writer had been made familiar during the later years of his life. The nearest approach that we may make to literalism in the latter part of this nineteenth chapter is, that the beast and the false prophet represent political and religious systems, seemingly all-powerful at that time, but to the prophetic eye of the seer already doomed. Apparently in their full power they collapse and perish, as if men were taken alive in battle and put to death. That is the immediate application, but the general idea may well be that whatever is opposed to the Kingdom of Christ, whether embodied in men or in systems, must ultimately perish. It *can* be overcome now, in thee and around, because it is not only thou who fightest against it, but the Son of God Himself and His holy angels, and the redeemed in heaven and on earth. The pampered and popular evil will one day be overthrown. It will become as hateful as carrion, upon which the birds of the air do feed.

2. The second part of the story concerns the overthrow of Satan, his captivity, release, and final destruction as a power over the souls of men. Let us approach

this passage with an open mind, alive to its purely symbolical character. Let us realise, for example, that all numbers in this book, whether seven or twelve or a thousand, are entirely symbolical, and generally stand for something perfect or complete or as denoting a period, and therefore one thousand may mean a long period—or, as Dr. Milligan suggests, here it may mean perfectly, and that Satan therefore is completely bound. Further, remember that to the writer of this book the power which is behind the throne of Rome and behind the Jewish power which persecutes the Christians, is the malignant spiritual power of the devil. The Jews are called the synagogue of Satan (iii. 9). Pergamum, the local seat of the Imperial Government, is called the place where Satan dwelleth and where Satan's throne is (ii. 13). This malign power, inspiring and operating through all opposition to the cause of Christ in the earth, will be perfectly curbed for a time. Concurrently with the restraint and captivity of this evil power is the shining forth of the reign of Christ and of those who have been faithful to Him. It is not at all certain that this indicates His visible appearance on the earth. It does not say so. It is said that the martyrs live and reign with Christ a thousand years, which may mean completely or it may be for a long period. Then at the end of this time the power of evil is loosed again, and goes forth to deceive the nations once more. Read Ezek. xxxviii. and xxxix., and see how this writer has used that material—Gog and Magog probably standing for

the heathen and barbarous powers, stirring them up against the Church of Christ, called here the camp of the saints and the beloved city, which attempt utterly fails. The nations are destroyed and the prime powers of evil are rendered helpless for ever.

Now we know the belief that has been built up upon this chapter. That there will be a period of a thousand years of the visible and unopposed reign of Christ upon the earth when His people will return to reign with Him. It is a very slight foundation for so great a belief. Why not strictly adhere to the figurative nature of the narrative? for after all it is only the *martyred* saints that are said to live again. Dr. Milligan suggests that the time when Satan was bound was the time when our Lord was crucified and raised from the dead, that ever since then he has had no power to hurt the saints, that while he has been loosed for the world he is conquered and bound for the saints, unable to hurt those who are kept in the hollow of the Lord's hand. Why should we adopt that interpretation? Who among the truest of the saints would agree that Satan for him was bound? Have we not warfare every day with him? Does he not hurt us and wound us, and even cause us to fall? Does he not defile and plague us? Do we not cry "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

Why not try to catch the spirit of this passage? It may point to a specific time. It may refer to recurring cycles of time, when the power of evil is curbed and restrained. Such a time, some would say, as the reign

of Puritanism in England or the time of a great religious revival, a time when evil is held back and detested, when the bad passions of men and their evil tendencies are held in strong restraint, when bad habits are hateful in the sight of men, when faith which has been persecuted and religion that has been scorned and holy pleasures which have been despised and detested recover favour in the sight of men, when Godliness rules, when the name of Christ is not blasphemed or neglected, but honoured and worshipped, and He rules, through His people, over the customs and habits, the lives and homes of men ; when the principles for which martyrs suffered and were killed come to honour and are in the ascendant, and these pure and true souls live over again in the lives of their descendants. One cannot tell all that was in the mind of the seer—the period of rest between two persecutions ; the day when the Christian faith, dishonoured and scorned, should be the recognised faith of the Empire. One imagines that there have been periods when it seemed as if Satan were bound and the saints were reigning in the earth and Christ were reigning in them, and that the thrones of judgment were given them, and it may well be that this is the only reign of Christ on the earth that we shall know. We may be sure of this, that it is the ideal condition of things to be sedulously striven after—that the followers of Christ in whom He lives should have the pure and holy spirit of the martyrs who would not worship the beast nor his image nor receive his mark ; who would

not surrender to the world-power for either its honours or its protection, but who would be so steadfast in their loyalty to their Lord as to win their way to influence and authority among men. It is written in the first chapter of this book "He hath made us kings and priests." It is also written (verse 10), "We shall reign on the earth."

The trouble is that the evil breaks out again. Satan is loosed out of his prison. That also happens in history. The evil that is curbed and restrained breaks forth again. You see it in an individual. The base passion, the bad habit held in check, apparently subdued, breaks its bonds and asserts itself afresh. You may see it in society. There is a recrudescence of falsehood and of folly, a great degeneration. You may see it even in religion. There are recoils—men swing from one side to the other. With the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. the suppressed and pent-up vices seemed to flow back upon the life of the nation. The Satan that seemed to be bound was loosed again. It is this that distresses and burdens the mind of earnest people. We seem to live in cycles and to make no progress. After the rule of the saints in the first paragraph of this chapter you get a period of renewed activity on the part of those who are opposed to the saints. The nations from the four corners of the earth, like the sand of the sea, gather once more to threaten the camp of the saints and the City of God.

But once again this book is true to its message,

Whatever the symbolism be, the ultimate is always Jesus Christ the Conqueror, and this goes further than any previous vision. The devil that is behind all the evil that is in the world is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. It is the final scene, and it is the defeat of the power of evil and the victory of Christ and His army. That is to be the final outcome.

I get therefore beneath the figures, and I learn these great lessons. Whatever the mystery of the power of evil—call it what you will, principle or person—it is real, it assails me in my life and work, and you in yours. Heap up all the names of (chapter xx. 2), the dragon, the old serpent, the devil, and Satan. I know all these aspects of the power of evil in my own breast, the slimy and subtle serpent, the adversary of all that is pure and good, the devouring dragon that eats up my good resolves, the abhorrent suggester of evil things. For a time I know the curbing and again I seem to be free, then the renewed outbreak. But here is the great lesson. He is ultimately subject to the control of God. There are not two Lords in the Universe, but one. There are not two thrones, but one, and God sits on it. There may be a strong man, armed, keeping the house of the victim of evil, but there is a stronger than he who will bind him and set the captives free that are under his hand.

Whatever the necessity of the existence of moral evil may be, whatever may be beneath this and kindred words, "he must be loosed for a little time," I believe

this—that moral evil with all its agents is ultimately subject to the power and authority of God who is on the Throne. And whatever else it is here for, it is here to be conquered. All through this book you meet with people who have conquered. The people in the white robe. The people who have not bowed the knee to the beast, who have not been terrified by the dragon, nor overcome by the adversary. All through the book they are crowned with honour. They have been oppressed, wronged, persecuted, killed, but they have conquered and Christ has conquered in them, and every conquest of that sort brings the final conquest a step nearer—the final conquest of which there can be no manner of doubt. On this we rest.

It is not Christ who is going to be defeated. "The devil who deceived the nations (xx. 10) has always been suggesting that He is. He whispers that into the ear of the Christian, the preacher, the worker, the sufferer, suggesting that you may banish your dreams of a world-wide dominion of Christ. That dominion has been in the world nearly two thousand years now, and see how small a part of the world really believes in Him, and see what He does for the people who trust Him and how few keep His sayings. He suggests to the man who is the enemy of good, 'good can be mastered, you can terrify it off the face of the earth. It is a white-faced coward embodied in some person who objects to your methods, and protests against your practice and spirit.'" One of the delusions of the devil is that goodness is so

soft and yielding that it can be cowed and crushed. But it cannot. In the person of some weak woman, some frail maiden, it has resisted even unto death, and even in dying has triumphed. And it will triumph. Let us lift up our eyes to that consummation and fix them firmly upon it. Not Satan bound for a thousand years, but Satan for ever destroyed. The principle of evil for ever obliterated from the life of man and from the universe ; all that is opposed to God overcome and destroyed—cast into the lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death. And the beginnings of that experience are now. We may know them in our own hearts. The overcoming Christ is with us and will dwell in us by the might of His spirit. We may have the joy of the victors who overcome, and in whom the power of Satan is bound and bruised and destroyed.

JUDGMENT AND THE NEW ORDER

REV. xx. 11—xxi. 8

PROFOUND awe must have gathered over the heart of the writer as he penned the last paragraph of chapter xx., and over the hearts of the hearers as its solemn and searching message was read to them. There is no mistaking the meaning of the stately and impressive imagery with which the chapter moves to its conclusion. It is the day of judgment, the judgment of the dead. Much concerning what one of our old hymn writers termed, "the pomp of that tremendous day," is hidden. We may not dissect the imagery or turn the solemn poetry into literal prose. What we may be sure of is that the New Testament clearly teaches the fact of judgment if it teaches any fact at all. It is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment. These two experiences are laid up for all the children of men. Our Lord taught it if He taught anything. Paul taught it if he taught anything at all. It was to him an ever-present consciousness, an august and impelling reality. The Lord, the righteous Judge; the judgment seat of Christ; standing before Him in the great day. These solemn realities never grew dim for him and they moved and coloured his whole life.

We must either accept the fact or refuse a considerable part of the New Testament, and reject an integral part of the faith of the Holy Catholic Church. Here is a vital article of her belief embodied in her great song, "We believe that Thou shall come to be our Judge. We therefore pray Thee help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood." As to times and seasons a clear conclusion is hopeless. They are in the Father's own power. We must not base any chronological conclusions on the book of Revelation. It is not chronological. Through the medium of rich figures it conveys needful truth, and the truth is the vital thing. For example, there seems at the close of chapter xx. to be an end of all who are not written in the Lamb's book of life. They are cast into the lake of fire. Yet in chapter xxi. 8 these same people seem to appear again, to be again destroyed. Again they appear in chapter xxii. 11, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still, etc." And yet once more, in chapter xxii. 15, where they are outside the Holy City. It simply emphasises the fact that the book is not to be treated chronologically. It states the same things over and over again in different ways as if to impress them more deeply on the memory of the reader.

Let us mark reverently some of the conspicuous features of this great picture—a pictorial representation of an inevitable experience—and try to realise, getting beneath the figures to the fact that it is an experience in which we must all participate; precisely when we know

not, and it matters not. "We must all appear," says Paul—"We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ." Here it is called the throne—our Lord speaks of it as the throne of His glory (Matt. xxv.). "The throne of God and of the Lamb," this writer calls it in another place. He gives no description of Him who sits upon the throne, as he gives a description of the glorified Christ in the first chapter. There is a reverent and dignified restraint and reticence which we may well imitate.

The throne is white, indicating among other things the pure and perfect justice of the Sovereign Judge. No tyrant is there as on the throne of Rome, issuing arbitrary decrees and pronouncing biassed and partial judgments. The judge is not bribed by offerings. It is not mere power that is the prominent feature of the throne—though power is there—but purity. Nothing is overlooked—no temptation, no provocation, no hindering weakness, no ignorance. Here is the word of Jesus, "He that knew not his Lord's will and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes." The consciousness that lay in the heart of the father of the faithful may well be the comfort of every faithful soul. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" The throne of the Eternal has no stain on it. A great white throne it is.

And judgment is according to *record*. That is the meaning of the figure of the books being opened. Every man, great or small, is dealt with, and fairly dealt with.

There is no respect of persons. The great and the obscure, the famous and the unknown, the king and the beggar, stand side by side, and they are judged not by human opinion or reputation but by the record. And we are making the record every day. The book may be our conscience or our soul; we are making it, and altering a line of Tennyson we may say—

"We are a part of all that we have *done*."

It has entered into us—faithfulness or unfaithfulness, foul thoughts or pure thoughts, cruelty or kindness, falsehood or truth. We are making the record. We shall meet it again. This is not my affirmation. It is my belief; would that it had more power over me! It is the consistent affirmation of the New Testament.

I may venture to offer one other word about the record on which men are judged. *It is the record of deeds.* "According to their works" is a phrase that comes twice over in the paragraph; their *works*, not their wishes, nor their dreams, nor their intentions, nor their regrets, nor their professions or protestations, or tears, or even their beliefs. Not that these are valueless, or that one would cast the slightest depreciation upon them. But belief and intention that do not ripen into action, and dream that does not blossom into deed, are fatally defective, and they may be spurious and worthless. "According to their works," says this passage. "According to the deeds done in the body," says Paul, while the declaration of our Lord in

Matt. xxv. and elsewhere is that the judgment of approval or condemnation will be passed on men who have acted or failed to act. "Inasmuch as ye did it" or "did it not," is the basis of the judgment. The Book of Life—or as it is called in chapter xxi. 27, "the Lamb's Book of Life," is probably the record of those who have followed the Lamb, and you may be certain about their record. No man will fail of righteous deeds who follows Christ. Out of that following grows all the worth and beauty of a fruitful life.

It is quite obvious that we are in the region of pure symbolism so characteristic of all apocalyptic writing when we read, "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." The passage seems to be a concession to human weakness, which regards death and the world of silence as enemies. They are personified as foes of men, as if one were slaying and the other devouring. So, doubtless, men had regarded death and the underworld. Now they share the fate of the beast and the false prophet and Satan (verse 10), and it must mean, as in those cases, the end of their power. The words of Paul inevitably spring into the mind, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death," and "then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Death and Hades—the two terrors of men in John's days—were to be cleared out of the way; they were to die the *second death.*

That last is a remarkable expression. It meets us for the first time in chapter ii. 11. Says Alford (Greek

Testament, *ad loc.*), "As there is a second and higher life, so there is a second and deeper death, and as after that life there will be no more death, so after that death there will be no more life." It is better to leave that sentence as it stands; meanwhile, the lesson most surely conveyed to the mind of the readers of this book is this, that all the terrific things that have haunted and tormented the lives of the saints will lose their power. Their vocation will be gone, and they themselves will come to an end. As moral evil had a beginning, it will also have an end. Only God and goodness are eternal. Whoso makes choice of evil will share its torment and its destruction. All that the second death may mean, the deep sorrow, the hopeless horror of it, no man can tell. Enough is said of it in the New Testament figures to lead us to pray with fervour and passion that we may be delivered from it. The promise is as ever in this book to the overcomer: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

The first paragraph of chapter xxi. is evidently connected with the last in the previous chapter. It is the vision of a new order. "New," is the word that characterises it. Not the creation or appearance of something which had not existed before, but rather the same thing re-fashioned after a better and nobler type. At the beginning of one paragraph we read, "The earth and the heaven fled away," the heaven meaning the sky, doubtless. Here is a heaven and an earth that can bear the presence of Him who is on the throne, doubtless because they are

sufficiently pure. The throne is still there. A great voice comes out of it (verse 3, R.V.), proclaiming the blessed message that God the King the Creator dweils in the midst of men and belongs to them. They are His and He is theirs, and He, sitting on the throne, is creating a new order. We do not understand this paragraph or put the picture of it in the right light unless we give to it the local colouring and remember the standpoint of the writer. We know what the throne of Rome was which bulked so largely before him and his companions in tribulation, and what its decrees meant —exile beyond the cruel separating sea; separation of parents from their children, and friend from friend; death, violent and cruel; tears, crying, pain, and mourning—these were the accompaniments and the penalties of fidelity to Jesus. Now there is to be a state of society in which all these shall have passed away like a bad and awful dream. "A new earth," says Peter, "in which dwelleth righteousness." "All things new." And chief among them a new Jerusalem. We are introduced to this term as early in the book as chapter iii. 12, where, upon the overcomer, "the name of the city of my God which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God," is to be written. Professor H. B. Swete, whose scholarly commentary on Revelation is invaluable, says, "The new earth must have a new metropolis," not Babylon now, nor the old Jerusalem, but a new city, God-originated, and God-governed; the centre

of a new empire in which God dwells sitting on the throne.

There is no reason why we should depart here from the view hitherto held in these studies, that we are in the presence of rich imagery. So regarded we may view the city coming down from God out of heaven not as a town of material houses, but as a people, a society of men who are not of the earth earthy, but born from above, and governed from above, living in the enjoyment of the vision of God and in the spirit of constant obedience to His throne, a spiritual society indeed. You remember the words of Paul; see their likeness to this paragraph: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away, behold they are all become new and all things are of God" (2 Cor. v. 17).

We are led irresistibly to ask, therefore: Is the condition of things described here present or future? and it seems to me that we are bound to answer, Both. We cannot exclude either. It is the ideal, and it will become the real. Here and now in the light of the beatific vision—that is, in the conscious enjoyment of God—a man may rise superior to sorrow and crying, to pain and tears, and may exclaim with Paul, "Death is abolished in the light of life and immortality." The seer seems to realise that this condition of things is already here. "He said unto me 'It is done,' or, 'They are come to pass.'" God is with men, and He is working the change. Who are the people who realise it? The overcomers (verse 7). They "inherit these things."

They are not God's servants alone, they are His sons. They have drunk of the fountain of the water of life, and they shall never see death. It will scarcely be questioned by any serious thinker on Christian things that if you could secure a society of people who kept the commandments of Jesus and lived in His spirit, the things that are mentioned in verse 4, things that afflict and terrify men, would either cease to affright them or would cease to exist as serious factors in human life ; and it is to such a society and condition that this book looks forward. It is towards that that everyone is working who is labouring for the fuller coming of the Kingdom of Christ in himself and in the world. "He that hath wrought us for this very thing is God who hath also given us the earnest of His spirit." For my own part I do not believe that this condition is to be postponed to a future state of existence. There may be to-day a society of men who are born from above, directed from above, with whom and in whom God dwells, with whom and in whom is the throne of God, and they may enter even now into the earnest of this inheritance.

More will be said about this Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Church of Christ, in the next study. I desire to point out one feature only now—her radiant beauty. She is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The phrase recalls an Old Testament exhortation to the ancient people of God. The captive daughter of Zion is to shake herself from the dust, to arise

and put on her beautiful garments. It surely means that the most lovely community on earth should be the community of Christians, the people upon whom the glory of the Lord has arisen. They should never go mourning and sorrowful because of earthly trials. There should be such radiant joy in their possession of God as to make their peace and gladness the envy of all surrounding people. There is where we fall short, our spiritual possessions are so little to us. Certainly there are no people so attractive and precious in the sight of God as the people who believe in Jesus and seek in daily fidelity to follow Him.

The paragraph ends on a sad and warning note. There are people who fail. You see who they are by the description in verse 8. Keep in mind again the view of the writer, the time of peril and suffering in which he lived, the time of sifting and testing through which the Church was passing, and then read, "But the fearful"—who are they? Not the Mr. Fearings of John Bunyan's narrow way. For "fearful" read "cowardly," the people who turn back in the day of battle, the craven-hearted cowards who through fear of suffering break their loyalty and betray their convictions.

For "unbelieving," read "*faithless*"; people without faith and therefore unfaithful. Then the people who were saturated with the abominable vices of the heathen. Perhaps the "murderers" here refer specially to the people who were instrumental in causing the death of Christians. And there were the filthy people who defiled

their own bodies with the vices of the pagan world, and, finally, the liars, the people who tamper with the majesty of truth and on whose word no one can depend. What is striking is that these people are put in contrast side by side with the overcomers. They are the people who have not overcome. They have surrendered. We are all of us either overcoming or surrendering to the evil of our environment and of our hearts. And it is not by any means an uncommon thing for people who have been overcome to try to hide it and to deny it and so to add lying to the other vices. There is a suggestion made by one of the early Christian Fathers, that this whole passage refers exclusively to professedly Christian people. There is no need to agree with that proposition, but it is not possible from the form of the text to exclude professedly Christian people. Included among the people here described may be people who bore the name of Christ who had not overcome, but who had been sucked under by the vortex of worldly influences which surrounded them. Drawn away from their steadfastness, mastered by the flesh and by the corruption that was in the world. It is a fearful thing to think that there may be, as Professor Swete describes it, a baptised liar, a liar coming to the table of the Lord. "Look carefully," says the writer of Hebrews "lest there be among you any fornicator or profane person." Look carefully and look into your own heart. They are always *outside* the City of God even though they carry the name of citizens. And they have their part in the lake of fire now. We

may say that, even while we lift up our eyes to a future more dreadful still. The coward, the unfaithful, the filthy, the liar, is tormented now, and he is laying up for himself far worse torments in the time to come. It is not merely an arbitrary judgment, it is a part of the necessity of the case. We may well get beneath the figures, but let us realise and remember the great facts figured forth. To belong to God, to accept His rule, to overcome the evil passions and the temptations within and around us, is to come ultimately to the end of grief and sorrow and torment, into everlasting peace and joy and rest. To refuse His rule, to be so cowardly as to refuse duty, to be unfaithful in face of trial, to yield to the base and the carnal, is to sow the seeds of a terrible harvest whose bitter fruit, beginning now, will continue to flow in a harvest of contempt and shame, of torment and death. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

THE IDEAL CHURCH

REV. xxi. 9—xxii. 5

WE have in this section of the Book of Revelation a great and beautiful poem—a picture of a city, which has caught and fired the imagination of Christian people for centuries. Almost invariably the picture has been regarded as belonging to the future life. In sermons and hymns we have drawn largely upon the luscious imagery of this chapter for our conceptions of heaven. The city of this poem is John Bunyan's celestial city into whose splendours pilgrims were welcomed at the end of their toilsome and perilous journey. It is this picture that inspired such hymns as "Jerusalem the golden," and "Jerusalem my happy home."

Both hymn-writers and singers have been carried away by the rapture of the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God. It is not therefore an unmixed advantage that we come to this poem with ideas already formed, ideas which may be true in themselves but which may not after all find legitimate support and justification in the narrative.

If we were thinking of heaven exclusively as we read this passage, of course we should never think of being literal in our interpretation. Streets of gold and gates of pearl, and foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones—great material splendour would be to us *symbols* of all that was most rich and beautiful and

glorious spiritually. Redeemed spirits would want nothing with golden streets and pearly gates. They simply symbolise spiritual wealth and beauty. But when we come to read the narrative of the vision as it is, we see that the City with all its glory is not in heaven but on earth, not in another sphere but in this. Twice over the writer tells us that he saw the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. A City on earth then, which God has created and which He has filled with His glory and in which He dwells as King.

And apparently this City is on an earth that is not yet healed of all its darkness and its suffering. There are nations that walk by its light. Not "the nations of them that are saved," as the A.V. has it (verse 24), but simply "the nations," the idea being that the City is the light of the world. And there are nations that need healing and who find it in the leaves of the tree of life. The City has its great mission to be the enlightener and the healer of the nations of the earth. One of the touches that show that we are in the region of pure symbolism is found in the measurements of the City. Its length and breadth are nearly 1,500 English miles, and, says the writer, the length and the breadth and the *height* of it are equal.

What then is this City? It is very important to read the introductory words of the vision (verse 9, and following). One of the seven angels who had poured out the bowls upon the earth, perhaps the same who had shown the seer the judgment of the great harlot (xvii. 1) in similar language addresses him now, and

here is his word, "Come hither, I will shew thee the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." The Bride of Christ and the Holy City are one and the same. And the Bride is the Church of Christ, the company of the redeemed not in heaven only or especially, though you may not exclude that, but on earth, "coming down from God out of heaven," the Church of Christ in her ideal condition, the light and the healer of the nations of the earth. It is impossible for us to arrive at any other conclusion than that we have here the picture of what the Church of Christ ought to be — of that towards which she is to aspire and to press forward.

Once again as you read the vision you see how completely the writer is saturated with the visions and the oracles of the Old Testament. Instinctively you recall the words of the great Old Testament prophet, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." "The Gentiles shall come to thy light and Kings to the brightness of thy rising." "Thy gates shall be open continually. They shall not be shut day nor night. The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light and thy God thy Glory" (Is. lx.). These were prophecies concerning the old Israel of God, and they are boldly appropriated and expanded by this writer and applied to the new and spiritual Israel.

It was a great picture for the times to which it came. For it came to a despised and persecuted, a distressed

and humiliated, a poor and almost vanquished Church. Such a community as this disclosed in the glory of this passage did they belong to. So precious in the sight of the Lord were His own people. Such a City—spiritual, radiant and triumphant—would God yet build upon the earth, and out of such material. Such a community should the Church of Christ aim and labour to become.

Note the various marks of it ; we have met with some of them in other writings, notably those of Paul.

1. *Its foundations.* It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles are written on the walls and gates of the City for everyone to read. It rests upon the work of these great pioneers in the path of obedience to God and faith in His Son.

2. *Its catholicity and hospitality.* It has gates open—always open—towards every point of the compass. Not the East only, but the West. There are no inferior nations — no disqualified and disfranchised people. Barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman, white and black, they are all one in Christ. They shall come from the East and the West and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God. There are no racial preferences in the City of God and no barriers of caste. All its privileges, its exquisite glory, its wealth of precious things, are for all who will accept its laws and bow to the sceptre of its King. At any hour of the day or the night the man who will may come out of the desert into the City with its spacious shelter and safety and peace. You will note this about the ever-open gates that face every

point of the compass indicating both welcome and safety; *they are guarded.* Not by any frail human personality with erring judgment, defective insight, theological or ecclesiastical tests. Not by a priest of any colour. Not by a committee of the inhabitants of the City. Not by an apostle, not even Peter. At the twelve gates, twelve angels, pure and perfect beings who know and do the will of God. No human hands either admit or forbid to the real Church of Christ. They may do so to *our* Churches, by ordinance or by vote, but all members of the true Church of Christ are Divinely admitted and welcomed.

3. *And who are they?* Who are the inhabitants? The people who can live in the purity and splendour of the City. Nothing unclean can live in it. Let that be understood. When I welcome the unclean thing into my heart, I put myself outside the City of God. No one about me knows. I may go on as before. I may come to the Lord's table and pursue my Christian work, but I am outside the City as long as I live and cherish the defiling thing. Annually some of the best men and women of all Churches and parties meet in London to consider how we can expel the unclean spirit from the life of London and of England. We are bound to admit that it is here, working its deadly and awful work. Ah, but it is not in the City of God. There are a company of pure-hearted people in the world even now who walk with Christ in white, who have not defiled their garments. You and I, thank God, may be among their number. We may wash our robes

and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. And nothing untrue, no prevarication, pretence, hypocrisy, deception, can live in the City of God. Let the lie be in your heart and on your lips, it puts you outside the City.

For the people of the City are the people who submit to the *throne* of God. They do not cherish soft and pious sentiment about God. They obey Him, and no liar or unclean person obeys God. "They see His face," that is, they are conscious of His holy presence, which probably is all the face of God that we shall ever see. And no one who is conscious of the presence of God will be guilty of impurity or lying. And further, His *name is on their forehead.* The stamp of His image is on their character. They *are like God.* And I would almost dare to be literal here and say that just as surely as vice, even the most secret, stamps itself upon the face of man, so goodness makes and leaves its mark on the countenance. You get the face of the saint and the face of the vile man, the mark of the beast or the mark of Christ on men's foreheads even now.

4. Another characteristic of the City is that it is all worship. There is no temple because the temple has done its work. Every building has become a temple, every man lives in the vision of God. The warehouse is a golden temple. The exchange, the factory, the house of parliament, the kitchen, the playground, have all been taken into the temple and have become a part of the House of the Lord. His presence is realised, and His throne everywhere, and all things are done for His sake. At present most of us forget God in our trading and our

play, and we need the Day and the House to remind us of His existence and His nearness, but the real purpose of the special place and hour is to enable us to realise Him everywhere and to sanctify the whole of life.

5. Another characteristic of the ideal Church is its large independence of material good. "The city had no need of the sun, etc.," I take to indicate that its resources are within and spiritual, and not external and material. It is possible for us now to be either so happy or so sad that we hardly know whether the sun shines or whether it is dark or not. Our big experiences make these things seem small. And the greatest thing a man can know on earth is the presence and glory of God. That experience, whenever it comes, dwarfs all others into insignificance, and makes you unconscious of their existence. There are many things that men reckon the sunshine of life that you can do without if you have the light of God's presence and love in your heart and your dwelling.

6. Three things seem to me to be typified by the measurements and the materials of the City. They are (*a*) *Comprehensiveness*. How vast the City of God is, practically illimitable. Not a few people, but a city without limitation and perfect in its symmetry. Then (*b*) *Variety*. All manner of precious stones are there; all kinds of life built into the walls of the living City; every colour and shade, as is always the case in the things that come down out of heaven from God, and all blending in perfect harmony. (*c*) And all precious. The worth of the Church to God is unutterable.

7. And not only to God, but to men. For here is a

point in the vision: kings and nations at the time this book was written despised the Church. By her beauty and worth she has lived down the scorn and contempt, and now the kings and the nations bring their glory and honour into her. It means that the greatest honour on earth will be to belong to the true Church of Christ. It is now to everybody who really belongs to it. And it means for another thing that when a man comes into the City of God he brings whatever was his honour and glory—his strength and skill, his power in any direction—and consecrates it to the service of the Church, lays it at the feet of God.

8. Finally, the ideal Church is a blessing, an incalculable blessing, to the world. I am very thankful that the whole description is not taken up with gold and pearls, walls and gates. If they were real, nothing would sooner pall upon you. There is the pure river, the water of life, and as its source is in the City, I suppose it flows out of the City, and on beyond, so that the voice can cry, "Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." And there is the *tree* of life, apparently in great variety, and it is not merely for the citizens, it is for the surrounding nations also. Nothing that defileth may enter the City, but surely the defiled thing or person that needs or longs for purity may enter in and be cleansed. Nothing that loveth and maketh a lie may enter, but the people who are tired of lying and long for truth may enter. It is nowhere said that need may not enter. The gates are surely open and the angels are there for the very purpose of welcoming such. I hope I am not

wrong in my interpretation, but I always regard chapter xxii. 17 as a cry uttered by the open gates of the City—a cry not to Christ, but to people to come into the City of God. The Spirit utters the cry in the heart, the Church proclaims it to the outward ear. There is shelter, safety, cleansing, healing and peace in the City of God, and through its open gate you may enter if you will.

The Church of Christ is never self-contained, shut up to the enjoyment of her own rich privileges and blessings. As surely as she is the Church and the presence of her Lord is in her will she have pity and power in her heart and her hands for the woes, the thirsts and the longings of humanity, pity to compassionate, and power to heal. In her will be the river of the water of life, because in her midst will be the throne of God and of the Lamb.

The question that arises in most of our minds as we contemplate this vision is, Will such a thing ever be? Will there ever come a time on this old world when there shall be a vast community answering to this description? My own conviction is that there will, and that, howsoever far the Church of to-day, with all the fatal mixture of people who live without the vision of God, without doing His service, without the stamp of His image on their character, without any healing power for the sorrows and woes of the world, with all the sad admixture of falsehood and impurity in our own hearts, may be from it, we are nevertheless surely coming to it. And every heart that in the presence of God makes the resolve to live pure, speak true, follow the Christ, is bringing that time one step

nearer. I believe it, because I believe in the illimitable resources of God and in the redeeming, inexhaustible energy of the Cross of Christ, the eternal spirit of sacrifice, and in His final and complete victory. The reign of Christ and of His saints on the earth I believe in and look forward to. It is the one Divine event to which the whole creation moves, and every soul that pledges itself in loyal love to Him to-day brings the time nearer. And when this old world has run its course and man lives on it no more, I believe there will still be a city of God in which His saints, redeemed and sanctified, will dwell in eternal purity and victory and eternal service. There will still be worlds in which to minister, some mansion of our Father's universal home in which His servants shall do Him service. God grant that we all be among their number. The gates of the City of God are open and we may enter. Heaven may begin on earth, and the life of it may enter our souls. The throne of God and of the Lamb may be set up in the midst of our lives.

I close these studies with the simple and impressive quotation of chapter xxii. 14—15: "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have the right to come to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without"—really shut out—"are the dogs and the sorcerers, and the fornicators and the murderers and the idolators, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" May the blessing of the clean robe, the pure heart, be ours through the cleansing energy of the Spirit of God.

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